WINDS OF CHANCE

DALE COLLINS

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WINDS OF CHANCE

THE STORY:—

In *Winds of Chance* Dale Collins has returned to the sea, which was the setting for *Ordeal*, still his best remembered novel. This, however, is no ordinary sea story with hard-bitten mates and belaying pins and yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum. It is the tale of a group of men and women, who, by force of circumstance, find themselves aboard a Danish sailing-ship on the long passage to Australia. The *Albatros* is more like a village to them than a barque, and they remain land's people who are very much at sea in their narrow world. Millionaire and spoilt dramatist, dumb but beautiful model and little English governess—all the characters are crisp and clear. Then there is that baffling toad, Captain Sorensen, and the even more baffling passenger, who, swathed in the white fortress of his bandages, might have been anyone—even the man he claimed to be. Obviously Dale Collins enjoyed sailing away from the work-aday into the blue of the oceans, and readers will share his sense of escape and find their sea-voyage a happy and welcome change.

WINDS OF CHANCE

By

DALE COLLINS

Author of—*Ah, Promised Land! Bright Vista, Far-Off Strands, A Sister for Susan, Ordeal,* etc.

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To Stanley and Kitty Pratt
For Many Things

All the characters in this book are purely imaginary and have no relation whatsoever to any living persons.

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WINDS OF CHANCE

CHAPTER ONE

I

WHEN Martin Trevellion—the Martin Trevellion—opened his eyes and found himself lying inside his mother's tea-caddy, he was surprised and puzzled, for his mother had been dead these many years and the brown box belonged to the far-off, hidden days when they were poor and he was the widow-woman's son. Also, although he'd been very small, even then he'd been much too big to climb into the caddy, and it wouldn't have swayed and creaked. What was he doing in the little old caddy if he was worried about being late for dinner at the Berkeley with Mercia? She was Lady Mercia in her own right, and like a white orchid as he told her at moments—precious moments. His mother had never even heard of Lady Mercia, yet he had to get out of the caddy and send Lady Mercia a clever and ironic and loving marconigram washing out the dinner. The wording would have to be good. She would demand this in the circumstances, especially from him.

The whole trouble was the fog. And now it had percolated into his aching head. All very bewildering. He did the wise thing, and fell asleep.

A long time later he had sorted matters out—almost. He was in his cabin on the cross-Channel packet—why had he ever thought it was a tea-caddy?—but owing to the dense fog God only knew when they would dock, and he had to warn Mercia, or she would be at the Berkeley and he in the Straits of Dover and then there would be all hell to pay, though it would be smooth and cold as ice, and too freezingly polite.

The funny thing was, the perplexing thing, that he should not have been in his cabin at all, but out on the dripping, shrouded deck talking to a funny little commonplace girl in a worn tweed coat with a cheap scarf wrapped round her head. It was kind of him to be talking to her as an equal

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and without condescension, but how had it come about? It wasn't often he spoke to strangers, though they often spoke to him. Aren't you *the* Martin Trevellion? Boredom inevitably followed. But she hadn't started the conversation —amazingly, she didn't seem to know him from Adam. He had begun it; perhaps it was the feeling the fog gave that one was in a white domino at a masked ball? It had just so chanced that she was standing next to him.

"The Air Force were even better lads than we knew if they had to rely on 'Mets,'" he'd said to her. "They promised us miraculous weather-forecasting after the war, and to my mind it's worse than ever. To-day was to be a perfect crossing—look at it!"

Just a point which had been irritating him since 1945.

He'd discovered the unknown little girl was crying, privately, not for him. She had told him the reason for her tears, but he'd forgotten it now, because almost immediately afterwards something terrible had happened.

But he didn't know what—so he went to sleep again.

The same girl was in his tea-caddy on the Channel-packet, doing something to his head and speaking gently. He couldn't understand what she was saying or doing, or why she was there—so he went to sleep again.

After time unmeasured and unmeasurable Martin awoke to find himself in the cabin of a ship—a cabin in a ship he had never seen before. He was in a wooden bunk with another bunk above him. His clothes, swaying to and fro on a hook behind the door, were the only familiar things. He watched them for a time, and they helped. He wore harsh grey pyjamas, which made him think of convicts. They certainly didn't belong to him—God forbid! His head felt burdened. He put up his hand, and touched a turban of bandages over which his fingers fumbled, vainly seeking an answer. The place was brown, like the inside of a box, or a tea-caddy, but in the wall there was a round porthole, and through the thick, green glass a shaft of golden sun struck in and went searching about the room like the revolving beam of a warm lighthouse. Suddenly it was shut off by a rising wall of deepest blue, bright and sparkling and full of frothing bubbles which raced and danced. When the water subsided the green of the glass came back, surprisingly unstained, and the sun shone in again.

No throb and pulse of engines—only the slow, creak-creak of woodwork, and the gurgle and gush of the waters against the side; a slow lifting and falling motion with a forward thrust in it rocked him.

From all this mystery and bewilderment Martin had a sick man's impulse to retreat back into the kind land of sleep, but he conquered it.

There must be a bell somewhere.

There was no bell.

He found his voice and called, "Hy, there! Hy!" It wasn't much of a shout, but it rang loud and hearteningly in his ears. At least he wasn't dead and quiet in his coffin.

No one answered. Only the gurgle and gush of the water, and the creak of wood.

He called again: he waited again.

No one, nothing.

He had to find out what had happened, and by what black magic the pleasant world which was Martin Trevellion's had been changed so that he did not recognise it. Exasperation gave him strength. He swung his legs out of the bunk and stood up, though somewhat unsteadily. His overcoat lay on the top bunk, and would serve as a dressing-gown. He fumbled his way into it. Slippers? It didn't matter. The vital thing was to discover where he was and how he had got there. He lurched across to the door, turned the brass ring which served as a handle, and, stepping out, stood swaying slightly, his eyes round with astonishment, his mouth open in a soundless exclamation. The famous Trevellion poise had quite deserted him.

He was in another brown box, though it was many times larger than his cabin: the saloon of a sailing-ship—he knew it as that at once. But what, in God's name, was he doing in a sailing-ship? The place was hemmed in with doors, but was lit from above by a big open skylight through which the sun flooded, rich and warm. Hanging brass lamps sparkled as they swung. The noise of wind and sea came down and the air had a salt tang in it.

At the long table three men and a girl were just finishing a meal, waited on by a steward. They were total strangers; he had never set eyes on them before. Then how——? But the girl had started up, and as she did so he recognised her. She was the person he'd chanced to speak to in the fog on

the Channel-packet. She had been in his muddled waking dreams. But what was she doing there? And what was he?

She came to him quickly, without fuss, competently, like a nurse with a patient.

"Oh, Mr. Trevellion," she said in a quiet voice, not fussing, "you shouldn't have got up by yourself. As soon as we'd finished I was going to look in and see how you were. Now you're here, come and sit down."

She led him across and sat him in one of the swivel-chairs at the end of the table. He was glad enough to lower himself into its support. The three men at the opposite end of the table considered him in silence. He could not see them very clearly yet.

"So—so you know my name?"

"Yes," the girl said, sitting down near him. "We found your papers and passports in your pockets, Mr. Trevellion."

He ran his hand across his eyes, and contrived a rueful smile. Instinct told him that this was a big scene, and he must play his part properly.

"You must excuse me," he said. "I'm afraid I'm—I'm a bit at sea."

The man at the other end of the table laughed gutturally.

"That is goodt," he said. "Soon now I think you are well, since you go making the jokes."

Martin focused his attention on the speaker. He saw a very small man, little more than a gnome, in a captain's uniform. He had stopped laughing, but his big quarter-circle of a mouth still smiled, almost from ear to ear. That mouth would always smile. It couldn't help doing so. It was like a toad's mouth. The whole face was like a toad's, receding back from that grinning mouth, the skin stretched and grey over frail bones. The eyes were bright and black as a toad's, and he leant forward, long arms on the table, as if at any moment he might jump. Actor though he was, Martin could not conceal his astonishment. The small, withered toad of a man was the last person in the world one would have expected to be the captain of a sailing-ship. The captain grinned back at him, as if highly amused, but then he would still be grinning if Death sat at the other end of the table.

He had given an order, and the steward put a small tub glass of spirits before Martin.

"Danish Akvavit," the captain explained in his dry, croak-

ing voice. "The doctors do not know it, but 'Snaps,' as we call him, is the best medicine. Drink, Mr. Trevellion."

He smiled and smiled, and was a villain . . . ? And yet he seemed friendly enough.

Martin was glad to obey, but found he had to pick the glass up in both hands, elbows propped on the table. Although the fiery spirits stung his throat, they put warmth and strength into him. He became aware of the kindly glow of the pool of sunlight in which he sat. The two men on either side of the captain were considering him with remote, bovine attention. Both wore blue sweaters. One was a blond giant with the blue eyes of a new-born baby; the other was gnarled and thin and tall, with a mop of tousled red curls.

Still holding the glass, because his hands were shaking and it was easier not to put it down, Martin asked, "Please help me—what ship is this?"

"This ship," grinned the captain, "is the Danish barque, *Albatros*. Me, I am her master, Erik Ole Sorensen. This one, he is Jens Larsen, my mate, and this one, he is my second mate, Lars Moller. They don't speak English." The two men, hearing their names mentioned, made small, formal bows at him, but did not speak. "Her, she you know." The captain lit a cigar, and his officers, as part of an established ritual, took out pipes and began to fill them, working shag tobacco with horny fingers. Captain Sorensen's manner, and his grin, suggested that everything was quite simple.

Everything was very far from simple, however. Martin turned to the girl. Her face by contrast with the others seemed familiar now, and yet——! She was not really pretty, apart from the fact that she was young, and, amazingly, she wore no make-up at all and it didn't matter. Her chin was firmly chiselled and her grey eyes were steady and friendly and kind. They were not at all awed by the fact that he was Martin Trevellion, but only sympathetic because he was still a sick man and bemused and lost. Her hair needed a wave.

"Just take it quietly," she advised, "and you'll understand soon enough. You've had concussion, and I don't know that you should be drinking anything, but perhaps it's safe enough now. Jorgen, he's the steward, wouldn't let you if it was wrong. I'll give you some broth in a moment,

but I don't suppose you could be bothered eating until you know what it's all about."

"Oh, no," he said, "I couldn't eat a thing yet. This is what I need." He took another sip of liquid fire. "Tell me!" he begged, feeling a most unimportant person and very lost.

"I'm Kathie Brown," she said. Not the name he would have chosen for one of his heroines. "We were talking by the rail in the Channel boat." She had the good sense to speak slowly so that he could take it in. He was grateful for that. "There was such a bad fog we had had to stop. We had been talking for quite a time, and then the collision happened. The *Albatros* hit our boat just near where we were standing, and smashed things. You said, 'She'll be cut in half! Jump!'" Martin nodded, brows creased. Yes, he remembered that: he'd been proud to find that in a moment of crisis he had not lost his head but had become a man of action. "You put your arm round me. We only had to step across a foot or so, and we were on the deck of the *Albatros*. There was a lot of noise and confusion and shouting. It was very foggy and dark. You caught your foot in some chain. You fell badly and hurt yourself."

"Yes," the captain added, "you give your head one mighty great boomp on the capstan." He seemed to smile with malicious glee at the fact, but that wasn't his fault. Did toads croak? Or only frogs?

"Yes," said Martin, "yes." He put his hand to his bandaged skull, suddenly haunted again by an old ache. "Wasn't anyone else saved?" Those dark seconds shrouded in weaving white fog were coming back in more detail.

Captain Sorensen laughed aloud.

"I think pretty soon you are going to feel one big fool," he said gruffly but not unkindly. "It was nodings, nodings. Just a boomp. No damage to worry about. We drift away, and pretty soon the wind comes and blows off the fog, and we don't worry no more, and it is a goodt wind for us."

A pang, a shiver, ran through Martin.

"You mean if we'd stayed where we were we should have been all right?"

"That is what I am meaning. It is only a small boomp, just when we drift into her. A bit of broken rail, perhaps a dented plate—but it is nodings, nodings."

"God!" said Martin bitterly.

"It's queer," the girl said. "You were just going up to send a marconigram. If you had——"

"A marconigram! I was. I remember now—to Mercia. She'll be waiting for me at the Berkeley. For dinner to-night. When shall we reach Dover?"

"We don't reach Dover," said Captain Sorensen.

Martin drained the glass and put it down. The girl touched his hand lightly, comfortingly.

"There's no use worrying about your date now, Mr. Trevellion. The collision happened a week ago. We're hundreds of miles out at sea."

"A week ago? Hundreds of miles out at sea?"

She nodded. "It was a very nasty fall. You've been sick all that time."

He sat silent. In the face of everything else the thought of Lady Mercia waiting at the Berkeley with no word, no explanation, remained vitally important. But he would ring her up as soon as he got ashore, and no matter how angry she might have been that night a week ago she would have to understand and forgive.

"Where are you landing us, captain?"

Captain Sorensen's grin spread a little.

"Port Lincoln."

Martin looked blank. He had never heard of the place, but then a sailing-ship would use all kinds of queer, out-of-the-way harbours.

"This afternoon?"

"No, not this afternoon."

"When?"

"Who knows?" said Captain Sorensen, with a shrug. "One hundred days—one hundred and twenty—one hundred and fifty. That is all depending."

"Port Lincoln is some place in South Australia," the girl said.

"South Australia!" It could not have been more preposterous, more outrageous, if they'd said they were off to the moon.

"For a cargo of wheat," added Captain Sorensen helpfully.

"But you can't do that to me! Why, I'm—I'm Martin Trevellion!"

"That I know, too."

"I've been telling the captain about you," said the girl. "How famous you are as an actor and a writer of plays and all those kind of things. I was ever so impressed when we found out who you were. I thought you were only just a nice kind of understanding man—I mean, when we met on the other boat. Being out of England so long, I didn't recognise your face."

Martin was so angry that he was hardly listening. He had to shake off this maddening sense of being trapped and powerless.

"I was on Government work all through the war, and ranked almost as a Very Important Person. They flew me everywhere—three times round the world. I broadcast as if I were King!" He was ashamed to hear himself bragging—shooting this line—but he couldn't help that because he had to impress somehow the grinning toad at the other end of the table. "I'm rich. I'll pay whatever you want. But I demand that you take us back to England."

Captain Sorensen waved his cigar briefly.

"Aboard my ship you demand nodings," he said. "But nodings. Here I am the master, and no English milord gives to me the orders."

"I shall report this to your owners."

"I am also the owner," Captain Sorensen remarked. "That is why I do not risk my ship to take you or anyone back to England. We are out of the narrow waters where there are still plenty of mines and other troubles. Always it is in the narrow waters that the sailing-ship comes to grief. We are off on our passage. I don't turn back for no one or nodings. No!"

"But if we pass a homeward-bound ship——?"

"Ah, *if* we do! That is not very likely. In sail we do not follow the steamer routes. But *if* we do, and it is what you call in the biscuit-throw, then I send you across to her, perhaps. I can't promise nodings. I think more likely you finish up in Port Lincoln. It is fine and warm there. To Miss Brown, I give the passage. It is not her fault that you make her to yoomp. She is sensible, that one. Already she is useful aboard here, and she will work well as stewardess. Yes, already here she is at home."

Forgetting his own troubles for a second, Martin glanced

at the girl and saw, indeed, that she was quite at home. And he knew, somehow, that though she was so ordinary she would always be at home wherever she was, and always be useful.

"An English milord wouldn't want to work here in the roughness of a ship. You have much money; you will pay for your passage. Before the war there are many who are ready to pay for the romantic voyage in a sailing-ship. A pound a day, they pay. Now everything has gone oop. Now you will pay me three English pounds a day, and it is goodt business for you. You will write a book and make much money. Two other people have written books about travels in the *Albatros*. They weren't no goodt. You will do goodt. Miss Brown tells me you are the great writer. Her I believe. So it is goodt. Everyone makes money."

He made a caressing gesture, thumb on forefinger.

Martin heard, but his mind was back in the real world, outside this swaying brown box, behind the sea and sky. What a fuss there would be about his mysterious disappearance! And what a muddle! Rehearsals of his new play *Alien Corn* due to begin with himself in the lead. The filming of *Death in Chancery* already in progress. The score for the new musical to be ready next month. A hundred other interests. And no Martin Trevellion. The life-giving spark, the vital cog, had simply vanished—vanished into the blue.

"I must get off a flock of marconigrams—quick," he said, striking the table sharply, the man of affairs.

Captain Sorensen, of course, grinned.

"Perhaps you are thinking the *Albatros* is that *Queen Mary*?" he said. "We don't have no wireless. The only messages you can send—they would have to go in bottles, Mr. Trevellion, and that is slow and not reliable, eh? So; Now I have finished! We go! And I think presently you are happy enough to rest quiet a while, my friendt. Coom, we go." He spoke to his officers in Danish, and they rose. The three of them made stiff, brief bows at their stewardess, and trooped out Captain Sorensen still grinning behind his cigar.

"What a mess! Dear God, what a mess!" Had Martin been alone he would have wept aloud in self-pity and frustration. Even with the girl there he could not keep the tears

from his eyes, and the words came chokily. "But we must meet a ship! We must!"

"Of course we must," she soothed. "There are lots and lots of ships, aren't there? Now you've done enough talking. We've plenty of time for that."

"Perhaps all the time there is," he agreed bitterly. And only this girl and the grinning captain to talk to.

"You're tired now," she said.

"Yes," he had to admit, "I feel as if I'd walked a thousand miles and hadn't slept for months." He put his hand to his brow. "Did I cut my head? Will there be a scar?"

"It was a very nasty gash, but it's healing well. There may be a scar, but I don't think it will show much. And now I must get you back to bed, and perhaps when you've had your meal the steward will give you some tablets from the medicine-chest to make sure you have a good, quiet sleep. Come along, Mr. Trevellion."

He felt weak and helpless and weary, glad enough to obey. She helped him up and across to his cabin. The bones seemed to have been taken out of his legs. The support of her hand beneath his elbow was welcome.

"Are you a nurse?" he asked.

"Good heavens, no! I'm just learning as I go along. But I don't think you'll come to much harm. The steward's passed his finals as a medical student and is doing the voyage for the experience and as a holiday. He's quite clever. In a day or so you'll be fit again if you take things quietly, and do as you're told. We must feed you up, too. Now in you get."

The rough blankets and the hard bunk were surprisingly comforting. He stretched out with almost a sense of luxury. The hot pea-soup she brought was welcome, too. The girl left him to drink it, and returned with the tablets and a glass of water.

"Now take these," she said, "and go to sleep and forget everything."

When you were lost and bewildered it was nice to be mothered. He was so grateful that he found something of the Trevellion crooked smile, and gave it to her.

"You're being very good to me, Miss——"

"—Brown—Kathie Brown——"

"—Miss Brown, particularly seeing I got you into this horrible fix through my crazy idea of being a man of action."

"Don't worry about that either," she said. "I'm happy here. You've landed me in a novel kind of job, I admit, but I'm liking it. Now close your eyes, and forget all about everything. The way the ship moves is like being in a cradle, isn't it?"

She was right. Blessed tides of drowsiness crept through him, and even the catastrophe wasn't worth bothering about.

II

The strange, rich green of the sea would have become Mercia to enchantment. Dolphins—purple-black, glistening—wallowed lazily through it, ripping the shining fabric which was rewoven in contracting circles, was broken again, woven again. The stupidly contented fish went so happily on their way, finding the ocean an admirable universe. Flying-fish rose with little plops of sound, leaving smaller rings, like moth-holes; making new ones as they plunged down.

With all that shimmering silk for her to wear, the very shade of her long and tilted eyes, there was no Mercia. She was more lost than if she were dead, because she was so very much alive and incredibly far away back there in London. The jade telephone was ringing and ringing; cars waited below in lamp-lit Brook Street, for somehow even in this blazing noonday when one thought of Mercia it was always night. The telephone chattered a stream of invitations, and the cars were eager to carry her off.

No Martin Trevellion at telephone or in car. He had dropped out of her smooth and shining and civilised world into the starkness of space.

Sea and sky, sky and sea. The *Albatros* might as well have been a tiny satellite of the sun. She dwelt suspended in emptiness, remote from the planet Tellus which was the habitation of Mercia and all the lovely women and intelligent men, the people who made life liveable.

Martin scanned the horizon again. He was Alexander Selkirk—O Solitude! where are the charms . . . ? No plume of smoke, no black dot growing into a child's toy strayed from the Round Pond, growing into a ship, a liner—into life

and escape. Only the sea. He gazed down into the depths of Mercia's evening-gown. A shoal of long and glittering fish were waltzing there. They flashed like quicksilver.

"How long the calm last, who knows?" Captain Sorensen had said to him at breakfast, answering irritable impatience with a grin of resignation. "Here we are on the northern edge of the Doldrums. A day, two, three—a week—a month—who knows? There is nodings we can do. We do not worry. More days, more pay, as the crew say. And more you pay, too—yes, that is true. But even you should not to worry, no! It is goodt weather for a man who is to write a book. Perhaps later on it won't be so goodt for that, and then you will be sorry that you did not get on goodt with your book while still you could."

Write a book! Without Jasmine to take dictation, without so much as a typewriter. And write a book about what, pray, out here in the silence where there were none of the vitalising, electric currents of human intercourse? Sometimes in the midst of the whirl he had sighed for peace, but the peace he had wanted was only relative—something that could be turned off and on at the switch. In his most harried moments he hadn't craved for stagnation, for existence in a vacuum.

For he was more alone on the *Albatros* than he would have been as a castaway on a desert island. The humans about him only emphasised his solitariness. Most of the officers and crew had no English, or a mere few grunted words. In any case he didn't matter to them, he wasn't part of their lives: he was the passenger. The captain wasn't fond of talk, and anything he said was given a sardonic and mocking note by his unfortunate mouth. There was Brown, the stewardess, of course, but she in some strange way had receded from him with his recovery, and become a part of the ship, as if she had been aboard long before him and belonged to the *Albatros*, whereas he remained a foreigner, an interloper. She was quite polite and friendly, but she was also always very busy, for her job was no sinecure.

As soon as his wits had been restored he had offered to pay her passage.

"It's the least I can do, Miss Brown, seeing it's all my fault."

"You mean to be kind, I know, Mr. Trevellion," she had answered with her gentle little smile, "but really I'm happier

as I am. I'm a working girl, and it's natural for me to be working. I'd be lost if I just had to sit and twiddle my thumbs. Besides, I like the feeling I'm a bit of use aboard. Wherever I was I'd have to be working—and this is much better than Woolworth's. Why, if it's a long voyage it might cost hundreds and hundreds of pounds, and I couldn't dream of letting you spend that on me. It'd be crazy."

"That's the least of it. You know I can afford it."

"I know," she agreed, "and it's nice of you to want to, but really I'm quite content as I am. I think it was a very good thing you made me 'yoomp,' as the captain says. I've been getting jobs since I was fourteen. This is much the most exciting and interesting one I've ever had."

So there it was—Brown was one of the Marthas. The women in his life for so long had been the Marys who chose the better part and dealt only with the finer things which didn't spoil their hands. But he wasn't going to sentimentalise over Brown. There had to be Marthas, or the world would be a most uncomfortable place. And she wasn't even sorry for herself. When she said she had been getting jobs since she was fourteen, it was a mere statement of fact, and certainly no plea for sympathy or pity. As they were bottled up like this, a calamity she wasn't otherwise. If this sentence of imprisonment were going to run its full term he would be crazy for someone, anyone, to talk to before long. And talking to Brown would be like talking to the maidservant. One would find just so much to say, and then there'd be nothing. Was it a kind of instinct of self-preservation which stopped him talking to Brown too much? Perhaps on this floating desert island in the salty vastness of the sea there was so little drinking water that he wanted to hoard the little there was against dire emergency? Perhaps the little bit of conversation which he and Brown could share had become a treasure stored away, like nuts by a squirrel.

That was a grim thought.

He wondered what, in the midst of the busy traffic of the world, they had found to talk about on the Channel boat. Nothing remained of that save disconnected fragments. She had been crying, yes—and whatever she had been crying about had been sufficiently interesting to stop him sending that message to Mercia, and as a result he was here.

Lord, that was so! It was almost as much her fault as

his! One of these days, but not just yet, he'd take her back to those moments in the fog.

O Mercia, Mercia, who are you with to-day? Do you ever wonder what's happened to Martin who adores you so? I always said you were a sprite most beautifully without a soul, but have sprites memories? Do you ask where Martin's gone to?—or is Guy or Alistair or Nigel or whoever it may be sufficient for the hour which is all the time you can count?

With the return of Mercia, Martin straightened up and looked about him, seeking all through space for the ship that was to take him back to her. In vain. He clenched his fist and pounded the wooden rail. Surely now, when there was no breath of wind to hurry them on, driving them away from England, when the sails hung limp on the yards, when they were caught and trapped in jade, when the *Albatros* was a toy ship in a green bottle—surely now was the moment when rescue should come. On such a day even Captain Sorensen wouldn't mind putting a boat over and sending him across to a liner which had paused in answer to a carnival flutter of flags.

The world was empty, save for another procession of dolphins breaking through the perfect fabric of the sea, letting it weave again behind them, slicing another rift. More flights of flying-fish, skimming, silver.

The two officers were yarning on the other side of the poop. From where he stood up there Martin could see the people of the *Albatros* going about their business with stolid and absorbed attention, painting, doing mysterious tasks with canvas and ropes, working with buckets of tar, chipping metal with chisel and hammer. They dotted the neatly ruled deck, like black notes on a stave of music.

They were in no hurry to get anywhere or to return. This was their world. It wasn't his.

III

In the five days of calm Mercia's green had been burnt out of the sea, leaving it dull and leaden, a flat and burnished shield under the pale arch of sky across which the red sun trundled wearily, never meeting a cool canopy of cloud.

Beneath the awning stretched across the poop the air was heavy and still, an opiate. On the port side, in a deck-chair produced for the passenger, Martin sat with a piece of deal on his knees to serve as a desk. He had been scribbling unhandily on sheets of cheap green paper such as only Continental countries bother to produce. It was horrible to write on, and the pencil was horrible to write with. The pencil fell from his fingers. It lay on the deck motionless. There was not even enough life in the ship to set it stirring.

Turning the pages back he considered the unformed scrawl, which hadn't developed since his schooldays, for when he wrote by hand it was only to scribble a signature on cheque or contract or letter, or in autograph-book. He did not flatter himself it would have been a disappointment to Captain Sorensen—who would have grinned—but the fact remained that he was not writing about the *Albatros*. Page one opened, like a child's exercise book—the efficient Jasmine would have found it simply too amusingly amusing—with a title in clumsy block capitals:

CHAINS OF JADE

ACT ONE

It had seemed to him that, as he would never again be so far away from Mercia, or see her and their life in longer perspective, now was the moment to get it on paper. He could be dispassionate about his passion; impartial in judgment; remote over all that was nearest to his heart, though it was nearer and dearer than ever now because so far away.

As he read he realised that remoteness was not enough.

"It stinks," he said aloud, and hearing himself say so was shocked to know in what a conventional rôle Martin Trevellion had been cast—he was the shipwrecked mariner, prisoned in his narrow world, speaking his thoughts to the tropic and unheeding sky. It was the kind of part any ham could have played. They would never have dared even to mention it to him.

"But the thing still stinks," he added, and going to the rail ripped the green pages into fragments and threw them overboard, where they joined the refuse from the galley and the other riff-raff which hung about the *Albatros* as though the clean water beyond her shadow refused to be sullied with her rubbish. The long, silvery fish flocked up from the dim

depths at this new addition, but before they even reached the paper they knew it as worthless and without interest. With a flick of forked tails they went questing in search of something better. They should have been dramatic critics.

From force of habit rather than hope the castaway scanned the horizon. He had to restrain an impulse to shade his eyes with his hand, so strongly was his distasteful part imposing itself on him and reducing his standards of what could be done and what couldn't. There were ways and ways of playing even the most stock character. Shading the eyes, flung forward tensely—that was Out.

The opening pages of the play that would never be written made confetti on the ocean.

The heavier hush of mid-afternoon burdened the ship. Martin stretched and yawned liverishly. His hand touched the scar on his brow. It seemed to be mending. The face that was part of his fortune wasn't going to be marred beyond repair by a touch of make-up. He yawned again.

Near by the mate, Jens Larsen, lay stretched at full length, on the planks, feet bare, knobby toes pointing upwards, tousled red head resting on a kind of Japanese wooden pillow. The rusty hair on his chest showed above his vest. As he lay flat on his back he should have been snoring: he slept as quiet as the dead, sandy lashes resting on freckled cheeks. A sailor lounged on the rail by the big wheel in the stern. He chewed tobacco, and at intervals shot a yellow spurt into the sea where it formed an oily, iridescent patch of rainbow tints. The only other person on the poop was the stewardess. She sat on an overturned wooden tub on the other side, industriously darning a rough grey stocking which must have been knitted for a giant.

Martin was still in the trousers of the flannel suit in which he had left Paris. He had discarded everything else save his shirt, which he wore open at the neck without a tie, and his shoes. Soon he would have to see what he could find in the ship's slop-chest, but he dreaded that for the clothes would be rough and ill-fitting. Brown had been fairly lucky. She, it seemed, had found a boy's dungaree trousers and a check shirt. She didn't wear the trousers with an air, so that you realised Nature hadn't really designed women for such garments, but had merely taken to them as the most practical

rig for this life. They were a bit big, but, as was her way, she contrived to look comfortable and at ease in them.

She remained oblivious to his scrutiny. There was one thing in her favour. She didn't think that because Fate—or Folly—had flung them together into this alien world it had changed their relationship. She kept herself to herself as a matter of course. She certainly didn't pursue. There weren't, he admitted, many girls of her class—or any other class, if it came to that—who wouldn't have regarded the set-up as the answer to a maiden's prayer, and acted accordingly.

The time had come to use up some of the little talk there could be between them, for talk at meals was difficult.

"You will understand then, Mr. Trevellion," Captain Sorensen had said, "that we do not wish to be the rude men, but we must talk in our own tongue because the *Albatros* she is our home and it is a Danish home. You are a clever man and soon you will learn the Danish. See now, the Miss here—already she learns quite goodt. So now it is goodt for you, too, that we talk the Danish, and then you learn to speak well before Port Lincoln, and that is another goodt thing out of the voyage for you, and we don't charge you nodings."

But Martin had no gift for tongues, and he was too old and too conscious of himself to make any progress. With Brown it was otherwise. She was a sparrow of life who could pick up a language or a living or anything else that was going wherever she chanced to be, without thought, as a matter of course, because she had always had to fend for herself. She was not daunted by mistakes which made the Danes chuckle and grunt. She just laughed with them, and tried again. Yes, she would be ready to take up a job in Denmark, if she wanted to, by journey's end.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

He smiled. That was a text he'd put behind him long ago. A widow-woman's son who aspired to the very top of the ladder had been well-advised to do so.

He knew no more about Brown than he had in mid-Channel. Any real conversation at those strange meals in the brown box was out of the question, with the sparrow eager to pick up more crumbs of Danish, and Captain Sorensen always listening wih one ear, and his appearance of grinning perpetually at anything the Englanders said.

Martin strolled across the deck, lighting a cigarette.

"Hullo, Mr. Trevellion." She greeted him with a smile, and went on darning, not at all fluttered by the company of the great man, and not out to impress him. Her manner was perfectly civil, but he had known duchesses and the wives of millionaires and many fine ladies upon their white horses who had been eager to do their very best when Martin Trevellion deigned to smile on them.

Rather comfortable, in his lazy and sluggish mood, to feel that he didn't have to produce wit, or even wise-cracks. He lowered himself on to the clean, holystoned deck, but she didn't notice the easy grace of the movement: Brown went on darning.

"Damn' hot," he said, resting elbow on deck and head on hand.

"Yes," she agreed. "Very different from the last time we really talked."

That surprised him quite a bit. It was as if she had been listening to his thoughts in the great quiet.

"Funny you should say that," he admitted, "because I've been wondering whatever we were talking about."

"About me," said Brown. "Living in your world as you did then you could afford to be interested in me."

"I am still, of course," he hastened to say, though she hadn't asked him to. "The queer thing is that owing to the 'boomp,' or the concussion or whatever you care to call it, I have all sorts of gaps. I can remember trivial things, like grumbling about the weather-forecasting, but I can't remember what it was that kept me with you instead of letting me go to send the wireless to—to send the wireless."

"We were just chatting," she said, "there in the fog by the rail."

She didn't bother to prompt him any more, but went on darning. The moment came back to him, and that meant escape from the present. He had placed her immediately, with shrewd, professional eye, as a governess, the English Miss, Mlle Smith. Only the name, it appeared, was Brown. A while later he had set a trap for her, a cheap trap, offering her the chance to stage a little sham drama in which she could play the heroine of any commonplace girl's dreams in

the presence of a glamorous stranger whom she might, or might not, know as Martin Trevellion, and would never meet again.

"And what were you doing in France?" he'd asked, leaving it open to her to say that she was at a finishing school and loved by a comte with a cruel father, or any other little, stupid fantasy she cared to play.

And she had said quite simply, "I was looking after the children in a French family—a governess."

That returned to him. And the feeling of being taken aback by her candour, and yet relieved.

"But you were crying," he remembered. "You told me, I know, but it's gone. What were you crying about so quietly all by yourself in that lousy fog?"

"Because I was leaving Paris, and might never see it again."

"Yes—you told me that. You liked Paris?"

"I loved Paris."

She said it with the simplest and most utter conviction, just as she had said it that other night. It was like hearing a familiar chord of music again. He had thought what a moment it would be if a woman had said "I love you" on the same note. That, and other things, had kept him there with her.

"But Paris to-day is hardly worth crying about?"

"You've forgotten," she said. "It's that 'boomp.' I was crying for pre-war Paris."

"Why, so you were!" he said. "This is fun. Like coming back to life again. God, I've been so bored. I was surprised because you seemed to be such a kid. And you said you had gone to France 'way back in 1936.' I said, 'Tell me about your Paris,' and you said, 'My Paris, not yours, eh?' —as if you were laughing at me a bit."

"I was—a bit," said Brown. "You must remember I didn't know you were Martin Trevellion then. Perhaps it's just as well. But you did it beautifully—almost too beautifully—and I knew you were slumming."

"Well, I'm damned," said Martin. "Couldn't we go back to there? It's so dull in this foul ship."

"You were very sweet to the little unknown who'd been crying. You knew she wanted to talk about Paris, and so you asked her, in French, to tell you about Paris, and that

made it so much nicer, because French was the right language for all I wanted to say."

"Now, I suppose," he teased her, "you only speak Danish?"

"Oh, no," she said.

"Tell me," he said in his French, of which he was proud because he had acquired it by such labour, "whatever it was you told me before, because it has gone out of my silly head."

"It was nothing truly," she said, dropping into the language as if it were her mother tongue, "but it was new to you, and I was someone new to you and droll, and so you were amused."

"I haven't been amused since. Tell me once more."

Her hands were still busy with the giant's sock, but she humoured him, giving a little shrug which was unconsciously Gallic, and began to chatter with new animation, so idiomatically, so fluently, that at times he was hard put to it to follow, and with an accent that put his to shame. Martin found the experience very odd, because it had happened before. It was a dream which had come back again; it was a film seen a second time. Though the blow had knocked it out of his scarred skull, the echoes were still there, and he found himself chiming in as he had back in the world.

There was little enough in the story, yet it was more real than the sailor lounging in the stern and all this hateful scene of ship and sea and sky.

The mornings in the Champs-Elysées and the Bois; the other girls and their endless gossip; the vagaries and virtues and ways of French employers and their children; what was correct and what wasn't done; the differences between home life in France and England. An anecdote now and then to make a point.

"And monsieur would cry out to madame when the valet left the dining-room, 'There is that Joseph in his old slippers again. I will not have him waiting at table in those so old slippers. You must send him away.' But madame dared not send Joseph away because he knew all about her lover who came on Thursdays when monsieur was on business in Lyons, and monsieur dared not either, because from his pantry Joseph could hear everything monsieur said when he rang up his chicken."

They laughed over that, but Martin knew that she was not

trying to impress him with her sophistication. It had happened so. Purely for her own enjoyment she revisited these quaint glimpses of the moon.

The afternoons off and shopping at the Galeries Lafayette and the Magasin du Louvre. (How far the francs had to stretch, when you were only getting five hundred a month.) The cinema—the best in the world, grown-up. The evenings off when they danced at the Moulin Rouge, not as sightseers but because it was gay and bright and cheap, and the French boys liked to dance with the English girls. The boys bought them café crème. Or if not, the three of them—there always seemed to be three of them—would slip out to the bar-tabac across the way because there coffee only cost a franc.

Martin hoisted himself up a little.

"But these French boys——? Didn't they——?"

She laughed briefly at him. There was no lipstick on her mouth, for she had dropped her bag when they jumped.

"You asked exactly the same question last time," she said. "It's funny, isn't it? It shows how men think. Oh, yes, they always did. But if you told them you happened to be good they just accepted it. Perhaps they expected us to be different. The English without passion and unsympathetic, cold-blooded. They never pestered, or tried to make it a condition even when they stood us café crème. It's not like England."

"I'd have thought——?"

"You'd have been wrong. They all could get their girls to sleep with them when terms were arranged. They were practical about their affairs. They danced with us."

He looked at her face against the sky which was beginning to stain with the rose of sunset. Her face was clear and virginal. It wasn't beautiful, but it was oddly fresh and unsullied. She wasn't thinking of him or the impression her gossip had made. She was recalling with cool satisfaction those nights when they had danced in Paris before the war. Through the cheap, rough clothes his knowing eyes considered her body. That was clean and virginal, too. Not the form of a pin-up girl—just a good, young, wiry body. Her Paris wasn't his, but it remained Paris. Perhaps the French boys had reason. Perhaps they had gone further and fared better. There were no voluptuous, promising curves about Brown.

The lounging sailor in the stern struck three bells, and the notes clanged golden through the quiet.

"Heavens," said Brown, "as late as that? I must be off. I've a ton of things to do."

She gathered up her darning, gave him a parting smile, and fled, without bothering to express the polite hope that she hadn't bored him by her prattle or anything like that. He had dropped out of her mind again as if he were nobody. Those bells, so much the same as all the others which marked the passing of the identical hours, had also roused the mate. He stood up, tucking the wooden pillow under his left arm, and ruffling his hair with his other hand. It didn't need ruffling, for his red curls always looked as if no comb had ever touched them.

Martin hoisted himself up at the same time, and Larsen, in passing, raised his hand in a gesture which was half a salute to the passenger. Wagging his head at the sun, which was dropping down to the horizon, he said something in Danish.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Martin, but whether he was agreeing that the sunset promised a wind during the night or merely confirmed that the *Albatros* was doomed to remain a ship firm-bedded in an airless bottle he had no idea.

That was the way it was with everyone aboard except Brown.

The pageant of the sunset was as solemn and beautiful as if it were something unprecedented, and never to be repeated, but Martin had seen last night's and knew that to-morrow's would come. The glory of the sky only made him hungry and lonely, and brought back Mercia—which was silly, really, for Mercia never saw the sunset, being always otherwise engaged at that hour.

All the same—Mercia!

He walked to the rail to look out at where he imagined Mercia and London were, and on the very rim of the globe, where orange sea and sky met on a silver thread, rose that thin and so often sought pale feather of smoke. A steamer raced along away out there, counting this most excellent weather. She was no static thing, dead in a bottle; she sped for home, needing no wind, no stupid, drooping futile sails, alive and throbbing and modern, made by men of to-day—

not a damned anachronism! Not a blasted, inefficient survival from the Stone Age!

Martin flung up his arm in salute and desperate appeal. Captain Sorensen had appeared beside him, moving silently in the carpet slippers he favoured. He wore his grin, of course, and even though he couldn't help that it was maddening.

"A ship! Look! A real ship—a steamer!" cried Martin.

Captain Sorensen held out arms long for his body, opened fingers long for his hands, and jerked his toad's head.

"A steamer, yes, Mr. Trevellion," he rasped. "Oh, yes, that is so. But you would have to throw a mighty goodt biscuit, yes? She is there, and going away—but we are here and staying. There is just nodings we can do, Mr. Trevellion. Just nodings. It is as Englanders say The Devil—but nodings can change that."

Martin blasphemed briefly and bitterly.

"You are oopset," said Captain Sorensen. "That is badt."

O Mercia, if only the foul wind hadn't deserted us just when it did! We were over there where the steamer is only a few hours before we were becalmed. I'm sure we were. If only——! I could have been up in the wireless-room ten minutes from now and you would have understood everything, and in a few little days we should have been together again. O Mercia, whiteness of the rising moon!

"It isn't goodt to be oopset. Coom, drink a glass of Snaps with me and then all is goodt."

The invitation was the first gesture he had made to his distinguished passenger. Perhaps behind the sardonic grin was a kindly heart which had been touched by all that the smoke had meant to a man so out of his element, so miserable.

"I could use a drink," said Martin. As a guest he couldn't very well explain the quantity of Akvavit it would need to make him feel good.

IV

Captain Sorensen's cabin, like the others, opened off the saloon. It was in the stern. He opened the door, drew a brown curtain and stood aside, signing Martin to go in.

"Well, blow me down!" gasped that hard case, Martin Trevellion, who voyaged in sailing-ships.

He had stepped clean out of the drab setting of the *Albatros* back into a luxury flat in a modern block in Mayfair. The walls had panels of fine brocaded satin in pale shell pink, and between the panels were jewels of modern painting by Matisse and Rouault and Braque. Even in that first glance they jumped out at him, because, as part of the job of being Trevellion, he had to know about such things. They were worth a fortune in both senses. No swinging brass lamps here, but tall candles in alabaster holders. The furniture was streamlined in an expensive light wood of silky grain. Drinks awaited them on a silver tray, the Akvavit in a crystal decanter, the glasses mounted in silver-filigree holders with tiny naked girls bent back as handles. The cigar-box was gold; the feet sunk happily into the richness of the dove-grey carpet.

Captain Sorensen stood chuckling at Martin's astonishment. He was entitled to do so. Even his perpetual grin was warranted.

"He is goodt, eh?"

"Good!—that's a beautiful understatement." Martin's eyes feasted; he could have purred. "Forgive me staring like this, but it's all such a surprise. Why this has nothing to do with the *Albatros*. It belongs to London, to New York. To Copenhagen, if you like. But not here—not here!"

"Help yourself to the cigar. I pour us the drinks."

Martin took a cigar. It was the natural smoke in this setting. He still couldn't credit that just on the other side of the door was the brown box of the saloon and all that went with it—or didn't. Captain Sorensen, in his shabby uniform, with his trodden-over carpet slippers—even Joseph in Brown's Paris would not have worn them—was the only thing that was incongruous and out of place. The room—you couldn't call it a cabin—to Martin was home, sweet home.

He raised his glass.

"Well, I congratulate, captain," he said, "but it's certainly a surprise."

"Ach, yes, a surprise, and yet he is not so strange. Here is my home: so I have him made goodt. The best decorator in Berlin—he had done houses for Goering if you please—he did make it goodt for me. A tall and clever young man, like

to you, Mr. Trevellion, but more of the lady. Oo, la! la! So! But goodt at the work. The money, he was no object, and we are having the power to buy as we willed. In Denmark I have been having a very goodt war."

One of his round black eyes was eclipsed suddenly in a wink. He drank to his good war.

Martin imagined he must have misunderstood.

"In Denmark? Under German occupation?"

The captain didn't show any embarrassment. Indeed, his mouth stretched still more widely. Then he paused to blow a smoke-ring and watched it drift white in the kind and gracious candlelight.

"But yes," he said calmly. "You Englanders, on your island, you didn't understand nodings. In Europe it was different. To me it is seeming that Germany will win the war and rule the world. I am only a simple sailor, but that don't make me the fool, Mr. Trevellion. At my bread I am looking, as you say, and where the butter was I see. The butter it was goodt. So! I am having only one life, and to me I am the most important man in the world. So I must do what I think is to be goodt to me."

Another surprise. Never before had Martin heard a man brag of having collaborated with the Germans, though he knew many of his smart French friends had done so. But collaboration was very much out of fashion. Nothing chic about it any more. Sorensen's frankness gave him a peculiar feeling, and yet he had to admit that the captain's effrontery made his actions seem quite logical and natural.

"But you were wrong," he said. "I don't suppose you'll deny the Germans lost?"

"Those Germans, bah!—they always lose wars, but they win the peaces. No matter to me. No. I still have won. You are shocked, yes, but you are an Englander who must be shocked at such things. They are not goodt to you. You say it is not the cricket, yes? That is your saying?"

"That's it," said Martin, though the saying was not one he favoured as a general thing.

Sorensen wagged his cigar.

"But life, he isn't the cricket either. See now, to-day because I don't play the cricket I own all these so fine things —and this fine ship of mine, her I own, too. You don't trade in the Baltic in wartime for the Germans for nodings. No. I

have money in the bank." His thumb caressed his forefinger. "Before the war I am working as a mate for other men for nodings. Now it isn't that way any more. Now it is all very goodt for me. Very goodt!"

Contentedly, complacently, he blew another smoke-ring.

You grinning old rascal, thought Martin, but he couldn't very well say so to his host, the master of the *Albatros*. You had to keep on the right side of him, and anyway, nothing a mad Englishman could say would have weighed with that dry old toad. And after the bleakness of life the wages of sin were very pleasant. He had never posed as a moralist. For him patriotism had been a pleasant and profitable duty. In Sorensen's shoes—who knew?—— There, but for the grace of God, might go Martin Trevellion.

"And how did you manage to hang on to all the loot when your side lost?" he asked, smiling as he did so.

One bright, reptilian eye was veiled again briefly.

"The simple sailor, he isn't always that great fool."

"Some simple sailors died fighting against Germany," Martin remembered.

"And some fighting for Germany," said Sorensen.

You couldn't argue with a smiling toad. The right thing to do would be to put down the cigar and refuse the second drink which was being poured. But he had to remember, though appearances were against it, that he was still in the *Albatros*, that little country of which Sorensen was king. Antagonise him and he might refuse to stop if a ship passed, within a few hundred yards. In the luxurious room, reminded of other rooms like that, Martin allowed his glass to be refilled, smiling ruefully to himself at the discovery of how easy it was to become a collaborator when the odds were against you.

"You write your book yet?" asked Sorensen, politely conversational. Did he know how riling that topic was? You could never tell by looking at the man.

"Not yet."

"That is the pity. Now the weather is goodt."

"I think it's beastly—keeping us stuck here, getting us nowhere."

Sorensen hunched his shoulders.

"We can't do nodings about that, but you could be writing at your book to make the lots of money." He made

his usual gesture. "Or soon I am thinking that you will be getting very badt, with nodings to read and nodings to do, but only to sit still and be sorry for yourself so."

Martin flicked ash petulantly into a golden ash-tray which rested on the table, an autumn leaf. The truth of the words only made them the more annoying.

"I've been trying to work, but how can I?—stuck here in this glue-pot!"

The captain's eyes grew even brighter, and he looked very sly.

"Perhaps you fall in love with the Miss, yes?"

Martin gave a scornful snort of laughter.

"Good lord, what an idea! You're crazy, captain."

"Perhaps it is you that will be crazy soon, Mr. Trevellion, and then it is you will be glad to fall in love with the Miss. Yes, we shall see."

It was a preposterous suggestion; it was exasperating. To fall in love with Brown! He was a preposterous and exasperating little man with his sneering, knowing grin.

A mercy that a knock at the door called them to dinner.

The others were already in their places, awaiting the master of the *Albatros*. The steward served bowls of thick soup. The three men were soon absorbed in their own rumbling conversation, which ground on slow and steady as the mills of God.

"It's a lovely room, isn't it?" Brown asked.

"A knock-out. Why didn't you tell me?"

"It wasn't my business to. I'm the stewardess—not a —a—reporter."

He dropped into French. "Do any of them speak this?"

"No."

Amusing to be too foreign for the foreigners. Even so he had to choose his words carefully. So many were recognisable.

"Do you know how he got it all and the ship?"

"No."

"During the war, by playing in with the—the other side."

She pulled a little grimace at that, but any further comment would have been unbecoming in a stewardess.

An idea struck him.

"One thing's puzzling me about you, Miss Brown. You belong back in 1939 as the English Miss, the governess in a

French home. Yet I met you crying because you were leaving Paris long after the war. How come?"

"That's a long story," she said. "Let's keep it for some other afternoon when you're bored and need company. On a voyage like this it would be an awful mistake to tell all the stories right away."

She was wise, as usual, but curiosity was quickened.

"Don't tell me that you——?"

The captain rapped sharply, rudely, with his spoon.

"The *Albatros*," he said, "she is not a French ship. It is not goodt to talk in French. Two languages, they are enough."

His mouth still smiled, but his grey jaw had hardened. He had a nerve, sitting there talking Danish which his passenger did not understand, and yet daring to dictate. What business was it of his if Martin cared to talk Hindustani? So he did listen with one sharp ear to all they said! But there had never been a man as difficult to put in his place as Captain Sorensen. He crouched forward, mouth stretched, round black eyes staring. The right words would not come to Martin's tongue, though it was usually fluent enough. He felt even more angry than the situation merited. The air was so hot and heavy and oppressive that his nerves were raw. He could have screamed, like a pretty boy at a studio party.

An interruption saved him.

The face of the bosun, round and red as a harvest moon, shone in the open skylight. He sent down a message of warning in a hoarse grumble.

The captain started to his feet with speed which lacked flurry.

"Is it a ship?" asked Martin, all else forgotten.

"No," said Sorensen briefly. "Weather." He padded out in his carpet slippers, suddenly brisk and efficient.

The two officers frowned and grimaced, but apparently they were quite prepared to leave the business to the Old Man, for thereafter they talked together more freely, glad enough to be eating alone.

"This place is like a furnace," Martin said.

"Yes," said Brown, "and worse every minute."

Invisible warm wool seemed to have filled the wooden box of the saloon. It pressed down on him. His body ached and tingled with the weight of the burden, and irritation and

unease seethed in him. When he passed his hand across his damp hair he could have sworn it tingled with electricity.

He pushed away the salt-beef stew the steward placed before him. Nauseating! Iced pineapple, perhaps: not stew! He mopped his brow with his only handkerchief. It was rough-dried; he had washed it himself that morning.

"I feel as if I'd been sent to the chair and someone had just pulled the switch," he said. "I'm going to get out of here, and see what's happening."

"Me, too," said Brown. "I'm all frizzled up."

But the two seafarers went on methodically eating their dinner because no order had interrupted it.

V

After the lamplit saloon the outside world was black as tar. The host of stars had been wiped away. The night shut down about them, and the golden glow of light from the galley, the deck-houses and the fo'c'sle were far away and suspended in the depths, so that it seemed impossible that one could have walked to them. All that remained of the *Albatros* was the square of wood beneath their feet. Step off that, and there would be a headlong plunge into nothingness.

They stood side by side, arms touching, afraid of the dark, children. For all the heights of sky above the air was as hot and heavy and still, the mental and physical oppression as great.

"Whatever's going to happen, Martin?" asked the small girl who was the stewardess. Her voice was awed and low.

"Lord only knows, Kathie," said the small boy who was Martin Trevellion.

Their hands met and clasped; they were so tiny and lost and unimportant in the vast and threatening night.

"Why, you called me Martin!" he said, pleased.

"So I did. It didn't seem to matter—out here—like this."

"Of course it didn't matter. I called you Kathie in just the same way, comes to that. Fancy saying 'mister' and 'miss' in the presence of this—whatever it is. Let's get up on the poop, Kathie. The captain's an old rogue and a toad, but I feel, somehow, he knows his job inside out. Can you see a bit now?"

"Just a bit, Martin."

"Yes, my eyes are refocusing, but even so——! Hang on to my hand." They discovered for the first time their hands were linked, but there was no need to remark on that. "Careful now, Kathie."

It was nice to have a friend.

They shuffled across to the ladder on the port side. It had hand-rails which were useful. Now they stood on the poop, feeling as if they had climbed high into the heavy air but without gaining any relief. They paused, panting like mountaineers.

In the fraction of an instant the whole world turned from ebony to sheer, shimmering, blinding silver. The light was so fiercely intense that it photographed on the startled eye the farthest horizon and the smallest rope in the rigging. The immensity of the chromium sea and the tiny chromium ship on which they stood were seen with such vividness and in such detail that it was as if they had been blind until the moment. A cat with arched back and bristling upright tail remote in the bows on the rail of the fo'c'sle-head stood out as clearly as if it had been caught alone in some dazzling spot-light, and yet it was only one of a myriad things—the faces of the crew below, the banners of the sails, the soaring masts and spars, the upthrust bowsprit—which were etched in simultaneously. The light waxed until it seemed the retina could see no more, and then—snap! the shutter of darkness fell, complete and absolute.

"Ah!" It was a gasp of relief.

With a roar which seemed to toss the heavy air in mighty waves the thunder came, crashing and reverberating, deafening the ears, buffeting the head with the fury of a gale. Out of the pit rushed a great unholy witch's ball, fast-moving, blazing with fire which had no heat, a madman's moon run mad. Before there was time to flinch or scream, it exploded, and immediately at the mastheads and on the yards bright white candles burned, lighting the *Albatros* as for a regatta.

"Oh, look, look, look!" gasped Kathie, pointing, and with her left arm she clung to his.

This carnival of the heavens had stricken him dumb. Words would have been wasted anyway, for now zigzags of lightning, surely flung by Jove himself, were slashing the sky,

and the thunder volleyed and crackled and crashed so that all the senses were beaten numb.

No breath of wind; only gleaming reflections in the mirror of the sea. The storm belonged to the upper air, and, apart from those cold, bright candles, had no traffic with the earth or the waters thereof.

Now the silver, now the ebony, now Jove's jagged spears, and through it all the crashing explosions as mighty forces met high, high above.

Far away in the storm-wracked sky twin pin-points of light appeared, a ruby, an emerald, as though a ship sailed up there. The lights rushed nearer, brightening. Martin's dazed mind wondered what this new manifestation might mean. Could it be the Flying Dutchman, fleeing through another tempest down the centuries? The lights, so near now, were lost in a blaze of sheet-lightning. A great 'plane, vast and wide-winged as a pterodactyl, swept over the *Albatros*, the sound of her engines drowned in the clamour of the thunder, her windows a golden bar.

Martin, head flung back, forgot everything save the fact that the men and women above might be in London in a matter of hours. The ship that afternoon had tormented him, but this was infinitely worse. England by dawn to-morrow, perhaps. And he would still be here in the green-blue bottle, stationary, corked up.

Another spear zigzagged down from the zenith.

Flames which were hot and red, not cold and shining like quartz, appeared in the sky. The 'plane swung back, a blazing torch. In a wide circle, hurrying, desperate, stricken, it sought the *Albatros* which sat there embedded in the sea, so safe and sound and solid, the only hope in a thousand miles. But it lost height as it swooped, and suddenly, so close that it seemed to Martin he could feel the heat scorching his skin, it plunged down into the sea and its small red hell was quenched immediately. Martin fancied he heard a hissing sound between two thunder-claps as the sea took it.

Kathie clung to him. He stood shivering, head averted, stomach turning over, cold sweat starting on his brow.

The pageantry of the storm had held the people of the *Albatros* spellbound. There had been nothing they could do, nothing that needed to be done. Now, however, the spell was broken. Captain Sorensen was shouting orders in a

harsh voice which contrived to pierce the clamour of the skies. Apparently the mates had joined him, for now they hurried by, spurred by his orders, seeing with the eyes of cats. Down on the deck electric torches made pale pools of brightness, and black figures moved in queer, stumbling, intense activity.

Martin and Kathie fumbled to the break of the poop.

Surely nothing could be done? Surely it was too late? The clumsy men who lounged about the *Albatros* had not the wits or skill to meet this emergency. They were so sluggish, so heavy; they were creatures of another, slower age. Between the flashes the night was thick and black and baffling; the wavering torches couldn't help them any more than the pale ineffectual fire of glow-worms.

And yet, in less time than seemed humanly possible, the lightning showed that a boat had been put over and manned, and the next flash lit the silver of dipping oars. A flare flowered in the bow of the boat blossoming swiftly into a great, red, living fountain of scarlet, lighting the sea and the rowers in angry brilliance in which bright sparks flew wildly. The boat crept on in its own fuming cave.

Captain Sorensen, a silent shadow in slippers, took shape beside them.

"Perhaps now we have the new passengers," he croaked, calm as though nothing at all had happened. "And yet perhaps not. It may be goodt; it may be badt. We shall see."

Thunder again.

"Oh, God, dear God," prayed Kathie, "be kind."

"It's certainly a fine spectacle," said Martin, trying to play the part of the Martin Trevellion, aloof and pleasantly cynical and balanced, the observer, the looker-on.

But it was no use. He blundered away to the side, and leaning on the rail was deadly sick.

CHAPTER TWO

I

BROWN had imagined she had done with ironing for a while, and a good thing, too, for it was a job she'd always disliked. Yet here she was with an iron at the table in the saloon, and she smiled as she worked. That was because she was pressing Magda's clothes, and she couldn't think of Magda without smiling. Magda was the loveliest creature she had ever met, and one of the silliest. So beautiful, and so dumb! The wings of Death, brushing her very closely, had left no scar, because she had hardly noticed them. Anyway, that had happened yesterday and Magda lived in to-day. She was perfection, yet there was no more inside her than there was inside a wax figure in a shop-window. That was why you could laugh at her and like her without even a twinge of envy. She had everything—and nothing.

Amid a hundred new duties Brown had made time to keep looking in to chat with Magda. She felt rather like a small girl who had been given a new and beautiful doll. She wanted to go on looking at Magda just for the pleasure she gave the eyes. It was nice to have something so pretty to distract one after last night's haunting dream of death and destruction.

The afternoon sun streamed down through the skylight. The electric storm had been followed by a downpour of rain which had cleared the air and brought a breeze. The *Albatros* had come alive again. She creaked along, she swayed along, carrying them away down the curve of the world.

Jorgen, the steward, brought another iron from the galley. He had wrapped it carefully in a piece of old sail-cloth to keep it hot. Jorgen was a good lad, fair and clean as a canary. Clever too. If he hadn't wanted to go adventuring he could have had his plate up as a doctor by now. Somehow he was different from the medical students they used to meet in Paris, who were dark-haired, with knowing eyes and bold and cheeky manners.

"Thanks, Jorgen," she said in Danish. "Enough now. I have finished."

"Very pretty, please," he answered in English.

The pair of them traded languages, each learning from the other. He nodded at Magda's costume and her under-things.

"Very, and so is she."

"Yes. Last night I am seeing her."

"I saw her," Brown corrected.

"I saw her. Pretty. Even when she is almost——"

"Drowned," she supplied.

"Yes, that it is—drowned."

The job done, Brown gave him both irons. She would have liked to have told him that it must have been fun for the irons, too, since they had never been used for anything more delicate before than the sailors' shore-going clothes. Her Danish wouldn't run to that yet, however. Instead she told him that he was getting very good at English.

"Please, you are too kind," said Jorgen. "And you at your Danish, you go at it well."

He clicked his heels, bowed, and went away with the irons. Brown gathered up the clothes, and, crossing to Magda's cabin, knocked on the door.

"Come in," called Magda. "All girls together, Kathie."

Brown stepped in and closed the door. She stood there, then, spellbound before beauty naked and unadorned. From the top of her head, with its crown of red-gold curls which owed nothing to chemistry, down to her gold-lacquered toe-nails Magda was a revelation of what the human form could be. Her figure was rounded and firm, yet slim and light; her skin would have shamed a camellia; her huge eyes were ocean blue and framed by long, curling lashes. She stood in an easy pose inviting homage. In that cabin aboard the *Albatros* she was dazzling.

"How am I doing, Kathie? Not much damage, eh?"

Almost impossible to realise that only last night the glowing, rippling creature had escaped death in a burning 'plane by the fraction of a second, and had been hauled out of the sea, a limp and sodden bundle. Nothing so terrible could ever have happened to her.

"You're wonderful," said Brown, on a note of awe and deep satisfaction. "You should be in the Salon."

"Whose salon?" asked Magda promptly, puzzled, but pleased by Brown's open admiration.

Years of facing employers had taught Brown to control her features.

"The Paris Salon—they have all the best nudes there."

"Like the Follies or the Casino?" Magda hazarded.

"Oh, you could be a star there, too. But at the Salon they have pictures."

"Not my line of country." Magda ruffled curls which had defied salt water. "Give me a good mirror, and I can see all the pretty pictures I want."

"That's true."

"I suppose my things are ruined?"

"They should be, but they've come up wonderfully, because they were so good. Just look!" She held them out with pride.

"It's a miracle," Magda said, and she bowed her head in reverence. "It makes you realise there is a God up in the sky." The beauty of this thought gave her pleasure. She smiled proudly.

"It does indeed," Brown agreed, face quite straight though inside she was full of mirth. Who would ever have believed that Venus could be comical?

Magda slipped on panties and a girdle worth much more than their weight in gold. She sat on the edge of the bunk and drew up a shimmer of stockings, caressing them with her finger-tips. "Another miracle," she said, and again she was reverent. "Not even a ladder! And now I suppose since you've lived all that time in Paris I look to you a bit like something out of *La Vie*." She struck an attitude, hands clasped behind head, shapely legs crossed.

"To the life," said Brown, laughing.

Her shoes had also been miraculously preserved. She adjusted her brassiere and pulled her green linen costume over her head. The simplest thing imaginable. Brown knew it had cost the best part of a year's pay. But you couldn't begrudge it to Magda.

"Just as well I hadn't gone to bed, darling, or I'd have had nothing to wear but my nightie. A shame to think of it at the bottom of the deep blue sea. If I'd had to appear in that I'd have created a sensation in this old boat."

"You'll do that, anyway, Magda. Here's a comb. I borrowed it from the mate. It's minus a few teeth, but it's clean. Funny when you've lost everything except what you stand up in—you have to make do as best you can. It won't be easy for you."

"I've made do in my time. You'd be surprised." She didn't bother about the tiny cracked mirror in a tin frame which Brown had provided, but ran the comb carelessly through her curls with the certainty they would behave. They did, bunching into place, showing her rose-leaf ears and flawless line of her neck.

"I suppose you have to take great care with your diet? That's not going to be easy. Our food aboard isn't like the Ritz."

"My sweet, I eat anything I can get, and the more the better. Show me the eats, and I'll show you an appetite."

Brown nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes," she mused, "I suppose you don't have to worry. Someone like you isn't made by following rules—you just happen."

"You're O.K., Kathie. We're going to get along. I believe you really do like me, though you should hate me like the devil."

"Me hate you? Why ever should I?"

"It's clearer than mud. Here you are, by an amazing bit of luck, thrown slap-bang into Martin Trevellion's arms. He couldn't run away, he hadn't a hope, and there was no competition. If I hadn't butted in it would simply have had to end in wedding bells."

Kathie burst out laughing.

"Me marry Martin? Why, you're crazy!"

"It's you that's crazy, for I do believe it hadn't even crossed your mind."

"Of course it hadn't. I'm only part of a very tiresome ship to him—the stewardess. He knows all about me. You don't think men like him go about marrying governesses turned stewardesses just because they happen to be thrown together?"

Magda, however, had no head for logic. Her eyes opened even more widely in pitying wonder. Obviously it had never occurred to her to reason about men. That, when you were Magda, was quite unnecessary.

"You are funny," she decided.

"Anyway, he's in love already."

An exciting piece of gossip.

"You don't say? Who is she?"

"He hasn't told me, of course, but you can't help know-

ing. He leans on the rail, and he—well, he kind of sees her in the sunset and in the sea and in the sky. He's goofy about her. It's written all over him."

It was Magda's turn to laugh.

"I'll give him sunset and sea and sky," she promised with the assurance of her beauty. "If it'd been you I'd have hated doing it, but some unknown dame back in England——! That's too easy, and it'll be a pleasure. Do you believe in Fate and fortune-tellers and the stars, Kathie?"

"I suppose like everyone else I do a bit."

"You wouldn't be all there if you didn't, darling. I'll let you into a secret. A marvellous woman in Knightsbridge read the crystal for me just before I left. She knew I was flying, and yet she said I'd meet a dark man at sea."

"Martin's certainly dark," Brown said.

"She couldn't describe him, but he was looking through a wedding-ring."

Brown had to giggle at the thought of Martin doing that.

Magda looked hurt. "I've never known her wrong. You just wait and see."

"I will," Brown promised, trying to imagine how Martin would react to her glamorous and radiant doll. But she hadn't the faintest notion, so she gave it up.

"It's going to be the fun of a lifetime." Magda paused before the mirror. "Talk about your Salon nudes! I never saw anything so naked as my face."

"You don't need make-up," said Brown.

"Perhaps I'll get by in this hick community. And now for the famous Martin Trevellion. Where shall I find him?"

"I'll show you."

"You're a good kid, Kathie," said Magda. "You ought to feel like pushing me back into the water instead of helping me."

"You'd find him, anyway," Brown smiled without malice.

"You bet!" said Magda.

She gave her curls a little happy shake. So beautiful, so alive, so silly—and it was always To-day.

II

The Doldrums had relented, and the *Albatros* ran before a light but steady breeze. The drenching rain had left her

clean and fresh. With sails like harnessed clouds, heeling slightly as she swayed along, sparkling foam fanning out from her bows, she was a picture ship sailing a world of poster blue.

Magda, stepping on deck, paused and looked about without any real sense of wonder or surprise. She was her own scenery wherever she went. The strange setting in which she found herself was in a way familiar. She had seen it at the movies: Clark Gable, Errol Flynn.

"Isn't it perfect?" said Brown. "One of the best days we've had. I love the *Albatros* and all about her."

"Whether I do or not depends," said Magda. "Boats to me are things you go somewhere in. The people and what happens—that's my only interest in boats."

Her appearance had already caused a stir, a spreading ripple. Blue eyes stared, blond heads turned, brown necks craned, gnarled hands paused in their work. She noticed all this, but there was nothing new in it. Still, pleasant: this world was very like any other.

"I've work to do, so I must leave you. Just go up the ladder there to where passengers belong. It's called the poop."

"Thanks a lot, my sweet," said Magda.

She walked with unstudied grace to the ladder and climbed it, followed by the tribute of every eye and leaving behind a buzz of talk which was more crudely flattering than polite. On the poop the long, red-headed mate paced up and down. She knew about him: he didn't speak English. Still he was an officer, so she gave him the appropriate smile. He raised his hand to his brow in startled salute, though he wore no cap, and his mouth fell open. The squat man, like an amiable gorilla, who stood at the wheel, stared round-eyed, too. It was easier to cause a sensation on board the *Albatros* than the *Queen Elizabeth*, though Magda had never passed unnoticed even in the largest liner.

Only Martin Trevellion, in his deck-chair, remained unmoved. But then he was asleep. A pad of green paper, tacked to a piece of board, fluttered on his lap, and his hand still held an idle pencil. Magda studied him with close attention and the greatest interest without appearing to do so. She could do a little thing like that with consummate ease.

A girl more or less alone in the world had to be wary. It

had occurred to her that the passenger might not be Trevellion at all. It might have been just a gag, to impress Brown and the boat's people. But that was he all right. She knew his face as well as she knew the King's. She'd seen it times beyond counting on stage and screen, in newspapers and the weeklies. A face worth knowing: nothing wrong with it at all. A handsome face, finely cut but strong. The dark brows lifted quizzically; the skin was smooth and tanned; the mouth had that crooked twist, so that even when it smiled there was a kind of sweet sadness. No doubt about it—Martin Trevellion in person.

And here she was, with no stage experience worth counting, because in the circumstances you couldn't count or even mention chorus-work in non-stop revue when you were little more than a child, here was she cast as his leading lady in a setting straight out of Hollywood for a run of God only knew how long.

"And don't forget, duckie," she told herself, though her lips remained still in a perfect bow, "that when Madame Stragownsky saw him in the crystal he was looking through a wedding-ring."

Jubilant, excited, she continued to contemplate sea and sky, lost in her thoughts, all unaware.

III

Martin had made no attempt to fight the tide of drowsiness. Surrender meant escape from the picture of the flaming torch quenched in the sea. He hated the very sight of the *Albatros*. When something did happen in the dreary, dragging march of the days it had to be tragic and terrible. Oh, to be Rip Van Winkle and sleep until he was called with the news that they had reached Port Lincoln! He frowned as his head nodded. A bitter commentary on his lot that he of all people should sigh to reach some obscure and barbarous town dumped down in the wilds of Australia. But, of course, it was so much more than that—it was the place where the gyves and manacles would be struck off, setting him free. Dear, blessed, Port Lincoln!

He slept, and the frown faded from his brow.

The frown returned. Something was calling him back to life, and he didn't want to respond. But the tug persisted.

His reluctant eyes began to open; he yawned; he fought to slip back into the dreamless oasis of his siesta. No use: the pilgrim had to return to the desert. The sense of compulsion riled him. There could be nothing aboard the *Albatros* worth waking up for.

Wasn't there?

He blinked, disbelieving his eyes.

Angels and ministers of grace——!

Aphrodite new risen from the foam!

And here on the poop where yesterday there could only have been a clod of Denmark or Kathie Brown.

He wasn't dreaming. She was real flesh and blood—very much so. Fortunately she wasn't paying him any attention, so, pretending to have dozed off again, he studied her from beneath lowered lids. Lovelies were, so to speak, part of his stock in trade. He knew them all, the darlings of England, America and Europe. Most of them were only darlings when seen from the other side of the footlights or through the camera's lens. A few were quite sweet, and there were even half a dozen or so who were intelligent and good company at board or in bed. But here was a lovely who, at least for looks, was the peer of any of them. He would have asked who she was if he had seen her at the Savoy. And this wasn't the Savoy by any manner of means. This was the barque *Albatros* fixed in the blue-green bottle of the sea for all eternity. Here she was a vision, incredible and exotic.

His blood, grown sluggish from boredom, ran faster, his pulses quickened: the fog lifted from his mind and sunshine struck in.

"Martin," he told himself, "the luck has turned. Since she couldn't be Mercia she could hardly be better. 'Robert Browning, you writer of plays, here's a subject made to your hand.' Or made to mine, Robert—like a glove."

She stood against the bright background of the sky, the breeze playing in her tight curls which were the deep, rich tint of old gold. Her body was a poem, her face a deep delight, her costume a creation. That last was important, the crowning touch. She wasn't only beautiful: she was civilised and groomed, the epitome of everything that had been once and lost this weary while.

Bliss just to sit and watch her. No need to hurry on from this delightful moment; the principal cargo carried by the

Albatros was Time, tons of Time. He dallied, a connoisseur gloating with æsthetic appreciation.

His heart felt young and gay.

"Oh, boy!" he said, "oh, boy!"—for behind the masks and faces he wore as Martin Trevellion there still remained a lot of the simple lad who'd been Widow Trevellion's son.

His eyes must have been more widely open than he knew. When she chanced to turn about she gave him a smile and a nod, as one passenger to another. But what a smile! It was like a rosebud opening in an instant. He jumped to his feet, but took care how he did so: a deck-chair in which you've been lounging is not the easiest place from which to make an important entrance. He wished he had shaved a little more carefully, and regretted that his feet were bare because he had neglected to dry his shoes after last night's deluge. Still, Martin Trevellion could rise superior to all such trifles, and now he was on his mettle.

"Please let me be first to congratulate you on an amazing recovery, and say how glad I am——"

He didn't finish the sentence. At close range her eyes were so blue and deep that he could think of nothing else.

"You can't keep a bad girl down," she said.

The line jarred a trifle, but her eyes were much more important.

"You must be made of iron," he said, trying to grasp what she had been through.

"Oh, you know I'm not, Mr. Trevellion."

She certainly wasn't. For she on honey-dew had fed, and drunk the milk of paradise.

"I was just going to introduce myself, but I see——"

"Why everyone knows you, Mr. Trevellion. You're quite a public character. I've often seen you on the stage and in the movies. It's wizard that you should be here. I'm one of your greatest fans."

"I'm flattered," he said, giving her the autograph of his smile for her album, and only vaguely aware that the goddess did not express divine sentiments divinely. "And how nice of you to say so."

"Speak the truth and shame the devil is my motto, Mr. Trevellion. Some people get a lot of fun out of lying and pretending, but I'm just a simple girl at heart really, though a lot of gentlemen have told me I don't look it."

"You look swell," he said, "Miss——?"

"Magda—just Magda. I'd have to look at my passport to remember my other name, and as it's at the bottom of the briny I can't very well do that. I'm never known as anything but Magda in my little world, but as it's a woman's world I don't blame a manly man like you not knowing that."

"Then if you're just Magda, I must be just Martin."

"O.K. by me, Martin. Martin it is."

She accepted the little gift most prettily. It didn't really matter what she said—to talk to Magda, to be in her shining presence, was better than a tray of champagne cocktails.

"And may I ask what is your little world?"

"I'm a model," she said. "A mannequin. But I don't mean quite an ordinary one."

"I can see that, Magda."

"One of the gentlemen at my farewell party said I was an Ambassadress of British Trade. That's how I came to be in that horrid 'plane. I was flying to South America with our Mr. Parsons to show the senoritas our new creations which would have knocked a big hole in lots of senors' bank-rolls. Poor Mr. Parsons. He was such a nice young man. A bit effeminate, but very nice, and the sort of fellow a girl could travel with and know she'd be all right because he was only interested in what you wore. It seems a shame he should have gone and got drowned. But there you are! These things happen, and I always say it's no use crying over spilt milk."

She dismissed Mr. Parsons and his death. It should have sounded brutal and callous, but Martin didn't find it so. Indeed, as he hadn't known Mr. Parsons and imagined he must have been rather a poor type, it was a great relief not to have to share in a hypocritical memorial service. Anyway, Magda would have been out of place among cypresses. She went with roses and mimosa and orchids; life not death was most obviously her concern.

The sun lit diamonds on the merry sea. Mr. Parsons slept many leagues behind.

Martin buried him with a nod of warm agreement.

"I'll bet," he said, "you're with Smith's, Magda."

"Why, Martin, you must be psychic. However did you know?"

"It wasn't a very hard guess. I've always thought it was grand fun to sell the most expensive clothes to the most expensive ladies under the banner of the good old British name of Smith."

"Better than Izzy Israels," said Magda.

"True," said Martin.

"Izzy would be tearing his hair at this moment, if he had any to tear. After all the expense and the trouble he took to get us places in that horrid 'plane so's we'd be first with the new season's things, and now we won't be first at all, and I'm off on a kind of yachting trip, and he'll have to keep on paying me."

They laughed at Izzy's misfortune.

"I'm terribly sorry for him, of course," said Martin, "but he can afford to take a loss, whilst I needed a bit of luck badly."

"I know you did. It must have been awful for you, you poor darling, on this old boat. I mean after what you've been used to. The little stewardess, Kathie Brown, was telling me." She paused an instant. "She's a very nice girl, isn't she?"

The blue eyes probed his to see what they could find on this point. Martin was amused. Magda was very much a woman. But so far as Kathie Brown was concerned he had nothing to hide.

"Kathie is a grand person," he said with the candour of perfect innocence.

Magda, relieved, said enthusiastically, "I just love her. She's been most awfully kind."

"She is," he said.

He looked through depths of blue into her mind and saw it simple and clear and natural as a brook. A shallow brook, but who cared? Hadn't he been dwelling in an arid desert, with water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink? Lines from the Song that was Solomon's formed in his head. The Book said they referred to the Church; they seemed much more appropriate to Magda.

Noiseless on slippered feet, Captain Sorensen joined them. Martin was annoyed that the toad had hopped into this conversation, but his disciplined face didn't show it. Magda greeted Sorensen dazzlingly. She had travelled for Smith's before. He was the captain, wasn't he?

"This is goodt," said Sorensen, grin widening.

"Oh, captain, what a beautiful boat you have! I know I'm going to enjoy the trip."

"That is goodt," said Sorensen. "I think perhaps, miss, you are enjoying most things. You have the enjoyable look and nature."

"Why, captain, what a pretty speech!" said Magda. "And you look such a fierce sailor!"

"I can be fierce, too," said Sorensen. "But I don't find myself so when I am talking to you. No. This morning when I call on you in your cabin I get a great, nice shock. It is goodt. The others, they are so sick and sorry for themselves. They cannot move; they cannot speak. For days they will be there. But you are like the larks, don't you say? It is goodt to be like the larks."

"Larks are always fun," said Martin.

"I didn't think, all the same, that you would be up like this by the very afternoon. My congratulations go to you. It is goodt. So now you improve the shining hour, as you say, with Mr. Trevellion. Perhaps already he is telling you that he is a famous great man of England?"

"He didn't have to tell me. I knew all about him already. In fact I nearly swooned when I heard he was in your boat."

"The *Albatros* she isn't a boat," said Sorensen. "We must learn to you of the sea. I shall be your master to teach it. The *Albatros* is a four-masted barque. A boat, that is those little fellows you see there and there, that we carry."

"I'll remember," she promised, dutifully.

"What's the latest news of the invalids, captain?" Martin asked.

"They go along, but not so fast and goodt as this miss here. That one the Doctor Himmelmann, he is bad burned. I think he will go in bandages a long time. But he has goodt care aboard. The steward, he is as goodt as any doctor. Better I think than most, for he still remembers what he learns. So that all is goodt here for them in the *Albatros*. Here all have rest and quiet, and that is the goodt medicine they need. Mr. Bramerton soon I think he is goodt."

"Poor old Bramerton," said Magda. "Millionaires never have much luck, except with money."

"A millionaire?" said Martin.

"The genuine article. Cement."

"So that is goodt," said Sorensen. "Here aboard the *Albatros* now we have many fine rich people. I am liking that."

"I'll bet you are," chuckled Martin, and he made the captain's own sign for money.

The captain thought that a good joke. He repeated the sign.

"So, you are right, Mr. Trevellion. Always Erik Ole Sorensen makes plenty money. That is goodt. But now see there comes a squall with rain, and soon we eat dinner. Perhaps you, miss, will take a drink with me in my cabin? I don't ask you, Mr. Trevellion, because we have business to talk." Finger met thumb. "Besides, I am thinking it is more agreeable to talk with this miss alone. She is very agreeable to talk to. Coom now, please, before the rain."

"Captain's orders, Martin," Magda said, "and I've certainly earned a drink. But don't worry, I'll be seeing you!"

She gave him a wave of her soft and manicured hand, and went off beside the toad—beauty and the beast, figures from a fairy-tale, though the toad had no diamond in his brow and certainly wasn't a prince.

A sudden mist of clouds had veiled the sun, and the silver curtain of the squall came beating across the sea. The air turned chilly and moist. Larsen had gone to the rail, and shouted orders. Martin paused beside him, before going below.

"Magda," he remarked conversationally, "has taken the sun away, O sailor, in her hair; she has taken the blue out of the sea to stain her eyes; she has taken the warmth from the air and carries it between her breasts which are white as lilies. In fact Magda is one hell of a peach, don't you think, sailor?"

The mate hadn't understood a word, but he knew Martin wasn't talking about the weather. He jerked his wild red head vigorously, and answered with enthusiasm, smiling broadly, showing big blunt teeth.

Obviously Magda was still Magda in any language.

IV

Captain Sorensen, of course, didn't see himself as others did. He had grown up with his face, and body. He wasn't

a toad, or anything other than Erik Ole Sorensen, a man in the prime of life, astute and wise and rich, a master mariner who was very much master of his craft, and craft, a ship-owner. He had lifted himself a long way by his own sea-boots from his father's broad-beamed fishing-smack at Blaavand. Very early in life, looking out to sea from the long beach of fine white sand, hands clasped round bony legs, chin resting on knees, he had worked out one vital lesson with no assistance at all from old Qvistgaard, the village schoolmaster. It was simple enough, and yet fundamental. The world and the whole universe, so far as he was concerned, only existed while Erik Ole Sorensen did. The day of his death would be Doomsday. There was nothing that concerned him afterwards.

Yes, a successful fellow, who had orientated himself perfectly. He knew all the points of the compass, and as men went was still a youngster.

In fact, whatever he looked like, Captain Sorensen was as human as anyone else.

It didn't strike him as at all ridiculous that he should seek to win the favour of his glowing passenger. Certainly aboard the *Albatros* he was the greatest man in the world, a king, an emperor. He was as much an absolute ruler as the Führer had been.

Already he had made a good beginning. Magda's South Atlantic eyes were still round with wonder at the surprise of his luxury cabin. It was always a good card, the ace. Simple or clever, rich or poor, it brought them up all-standing.

"Well, I never!" said Magda. "Why, it's an absolute love-nest! Who'd ever expect anything like this in an old sailing-boat!"

"The *Albatros*, she is a barque," he reminded her.

"Oh, yes, silly of me. I keep forgetting. But really this is wizard."

She gazed about at the odd pictures on the wall, which must be very good because they were so bad, at the satin panels, at silver and gold and glass; she felt the rich carpet beneath her feet; she knew that there was nothing so becoming as candlelight.

"Please to sit." He busied himself with the drinks.

The chair wasn't very comfortable, but it was expensive, the kind in which she posed when modelling for the smart

photographers. Poor Mr. Parsons would have clapped his hands in rapture had he lived to see the captain's room. It was the kind of place he himself had always wanted. It would have been the most natural thing had he been her host. It was quite the oddest that Captain Sorensen, padding in carpet slippers, should be. Well, the truest thing in the world was that you could never judge men by their looks. Despite his apartment, there was nothing effeminate about Captain Sorensen. He wasn't interested in your clothes, but what was underneath them. A dirty old man, if ever she'd seen one, but with a sort of queer charm, just because he was so ugly and yet lived in this love-nest which had cost a packet of money.

"I've been in captains' cabins before, but never one like this."

"Ah," said Sorensen, grinning, "but I am more than just a captain. I own all this ship, and very much more, too."

"You do! Imagine that!"

Sorensen did not offer her Snaps. He gave her a glass of port, which, he knew, was the favourite appetiser of the English. She was impressed anew by the fineness of the glass, but vaguely shocked to be using a little naked silver girl as a handle. It hardly seemed nice. Sorensen's starting eyes took in everything, and read every thought. The reluctance of her fingers to touch that handle confirmed a certainty growing in his mind. Though she looked like a princess, she was far from one. She wasn't even a high-born English lady. Her father might easily have been a fisherman, like his. A point worth knowing.

"So now it is goodt," he said cosily, grinning. "We sit together, just you and me, and here we are happy. That is goodt. Let us drink to us then, miss, and that we are friends."

"To us, captain—who's like us? I'm sure we're going to be pals, and you must call me Magda."

"Magda, he is a pretty name. Yes, that is goodt. So I call you Magda, my dear young lady, who is so goodt to see and gets very well so quick."

Magda liked a drink. She swallowed the port in two hearty gulps.

"Don't be angry with me, captain, but in England port's

really an old ladies' drink. I don't suppose you could manage a gin and lime just to wet our new friendship's head?"

"Gin I have not, but I have Snaps, Magda, and the real lime juice. That I mix for you. Just what you say."

He bowed willingness and homage.

"Has it got a kick?"

"So you speak all the slang?" said Sorensen. "That is goodt. I am one to learn of the English slang. I talk too much the school English. Now you will be goodt for me."

"I'm good for most men," said Magda.

Round eyes shot her a quick glance. Did she open a door already then? Her face was friendly and innocent. There was no sign of a wink, but if she found port a drink for old ladies——? It was all very promising.

"He has got a goodt kick all right," he promised, handing her a larger glass with a lot of Akvavit and a very little lime.

She took a sip.

"Now that's something like." Magda smacked perfect lips in honest enjoyment.

"Then soon you have another."

"I certainly will. Now tell me all about the boat—I mean the barque—and where we're going and the trip, captain."

Magda didn't really care about any of this, he sensed, but had only asked the question because she thought sea-captains liked to talk about such things. Well, it was nice of her; it showed the proper spirit. And if she didn't understand half he was saying, and had no more geography than a child of ten, it didn't matter. He had the opportunity to hold the floor and to work in a number of points which demonstrated that he was a very important man who reigned above them all.

It was only half-way through the second glass of potent Snaps that he ventured to raise the point uppermost in his mind. Sorensen had weighed the matter of letting it stand over for a day or so, but he had learnt that it never paid to hang back. He wouldn't have been where he was if he hadn't been prepared to take chances. There were many factors which urged prompt action. The Mr. Trevellion, for instance.

"And now, my dear young miss, my Magda, we have business to talk. You are a very rich young English lady?"

He saw Magda consider this question from a number of

angles. In many ways she was silly, but that didn't make a girl a fool.

"Well, yes and no," she said. "I earn good money, but I earn it. I don't own any boats—or I mean barques."

"So," said Sorensen. "It is goodt, you are frank to me. There is the question of the passage money which is to be paid, the fare, you are knowing?"

"Ah, yes, the fare," said Magda, and waited.

"The fare is three pounds a day. That is what Mr. Trevellion he pays, because he is rich."

Magda was doing mental arithmetic.

"If this trip lasts as long as you say it might, that's going to run up a big bill, captain."

Sorensen spread long-fingered hands.

"I get you there as soon as I can, but even Erik Ole Sorensen he can't command the winds and the seas. No. But still, we are friendts. With you I don't drive no hard bargains. You are the young lady too pretty and nice for that. If we are goodt friendts I don't charge you all that. I speak truth to you: I am rich, I can afford not to. Let us leave it all open for a while, eh? Then we see how much you should pay. Who knows? Perhaps it may be nodings. All that depends on how you—what do I say?—collaborate with me."

"Collaborate with you? Or am I mixing two words up? Collaborate? Just what does that mean?"

"It is my fault," Sorensen apologised. "I don't speak all the goodt English. Perhaps I use a wrong word. That is badt. I am meaning no harm, only I say we shall see whether you pay nodings or somedings when we see how goodt we get along."

"Just how good do we have to?" asked Magda warily, mockingly, but the gamble had come off. If he had read her wrongly she would have been out of his cabin by now in a fury.

"Just as goodt as you want," he said. The steward knocked at the door. The interview had been nicely timed. "See now, there is the dinner. A pity. But no matter. Often again I ask you to my cabin, where it is so much nicer than anywhere else, and is right for you."

"You're being most awfully kind," said Magda in her politest tone.

"It's nodings, nodings," grinned Sorensen amiably.

He opened the door with a bow, and did not even touch her elbow. He had dazzled her with only a portion of his splendours. Enough was enough, and the further outlook was excellent.

Magda entered the saloon like a golden light which dimmed the hanging lamps. Her smile told Martin that she was glad to see him again after a dull but necessary interlude; it shared a private joke with Kathie Brown because they were both girls together, and could afford to be amused by the funny male creatures. Not that she consciously set herself to do these things. No thought was needed. She only had to smile, and her beauty worked for her.

Places at the table had been rearranged by the captain's orders. Formerly his officers had sat on either hand, with Martin and Brown opposite each other. Now Larsen and Moller sat on his right, side by side, wooden, and Magda was on his left, with Kathie next and then Martin.

"Soon we are quite a lot of people," said Sorensen, "and that will be merry and goodt."

He grinned. Apparently he was no longer set on maintaining the Danish character of the ship that was his home. English would be spoken. Martin scowled and sulked. When he travelled he always sat at the captain's table and always above the salt. Now he had been relegated to the lowest place, cut off from Magda and with nothing to look at save closed cabin doors and two stolid Danes. And what had the old toad been up to with Magda in the candlelit opulence of his room? It was sickening to think of him gloating on her. She was only a radiant child, really, and not clever enough to handle Sorensen. But it was silly to worry. No woman in her right mind could look twice at the master of the *Albatros*.

V

Captain Sorensen, long forefinger raised, imposed silence on Brown. He sat at ease, finishing a cigar. A smoke-ring drifted. On the table of silky wood stood a small cloisonné box. A tiny jewelled bird pirouetted on it. The bright creature flapped its wings and emitted a flood of silver, liquid notes. The master of the *Albatros*, who could be so

grim, was quite softened by his toy. He listened entranced, ugly head cocked on one side in the rapt appreciation of a child. The song and the dance ended; glittering wings folded into place.

Only then did Sorensen give his attention to the stewardess.

"Well, miss?"

"Sorry to bother you, captain, but it's about Doctor Himmelmann."

"Is he dead?" Sorensen asked, without concern.

"The other way round. He's suddenly taken a turn for the better. He's very frightened about his burns, and you can't blame the poor man. He wants to see you at once—he insists on seeing you."

"Insist he cannot do." Sorensen scowled, and Brown regretted using the word, for although Himmelmann had been so nasty he was still a very sick man, and she made allowances. "No one but me can insist aboard the *Albatros*. Still, it suits me to talk to him, I come."

He rose, stubbed the cigar in the golden ash-tray, gave a last affectionate glance at the little bird, and stumped out ahead of her. Since he hadn't asked her to go with him, Brown crossed to her own cabin to see Mlle Armande. It was easy sharing cabins in the *Albatros*—there was no litter of clothes, no clutter of luggage. Passengers travelled very light. And no one could have been less trouble as a room-mate than Mlle Armande.

She was deeply asleep in the lower bunk. The disaster seemed to have stunned her. She needed no drugs. It was as if her shocked being knew oblivion was the path back to life—and yet she looked so dead: like a figure sculptured on a tomb, small and very still and quiet. The casque of her shining, silver hair, smooth and cut short, framed her face, a cameo carved in old ivory. If her hair had been anything but that sheer silver she would probably have looked her age, which Brown put at the wrong side of thirty-five, but as it was she had an appearance of timeless youth.

Brown studied her for a space. She knew next to nothing about Mlle Armande, and yet she was fascinated by her. Perhaps that was because she saw her as a symbol of her beloved Paris. And that was strange, for she had never known a Frenchwoman at all like Mlle Armande. The fact remained: there was Paris, always young, yet wise and experienced,

intelligent, mysterious. Brown was very glad that the flames hadn't harmed that body though they had burned the spirit out of it for a while.

Nothing to be done for Mlle Armande save let her rest.

Turning out the lamp, Brown went next door to Martin's cabin where Mr. Bramerton now occupied the lower berth. He was a frail stick of a man with a thin, lined, æsthetic face. He did not suggest a millionaire, a cement king, though there was a note of dry, white dust about him. His draught had taken effect. Perhaps he was even more like a figure on a tomb than Mlle Armande had been, a pale monk. Strange to think of him having all that money, employing armies of men, and lying there helpless in a wooden bunk in a sailing-ship. He should have been aboard his own yacht, or back in the air-liner heading for South America. This was even less his world than it was Martin's or Magda's.

Returning to the saloon, she met Captain Sorensen. His talk with Dr. Himmelmann had gone as she had feared. His eyes were angry, his big mouth tight as a trap.

"That one, miss, will have to have the firm hand," he said. "I do not like people whose lives I bother to save that try to beat my brow. It isn't goodt. Here aboard the *Albatros* it is I who give the orders—I, Erik Ole Sorensen. No one tells me where I shall go and what I must do. No one."

"I tried to warn him, but he is very sick."

"He is very German." Captain Sorensen of course knew the race extremely well. "I do not like the Germans now. He thinks that to shout the commands at me is wise. Already I am teaching him it is not goodt. Then quick all the bellow is gone from him. I tell him to-morrow morning he is to come to my cabin and talk as a sane man and be goodt. Otherwise I don't speak to him no more. That he has promised to do, crying great tears of self-pity and apology. Trouble yourself no more about him. With his silly bullying and as he is, he has worn himself out and now he is asleep or not conscious. I don't know; I don't care. That loud-voiced cry-baby, as you say, let him be."

"Yes, captain," said Brown, willingly enough for she didn't like Himmelmann.

"To-morrow he sings a different tune, yes," said Sorensen.

"And now I go back to listen to prettier music from my so small bird."

The air was stale in the saloon, and the long, full day was over. With a sense of release Brown went out to the main deck. The *Albatros* swept on through starry brightness, her sails towering up like the snowy mountains Brown used to see away off on the hostile Italian frontier. The waters slipped by, hushing and hushing as they went. Ropes creaked and blocks muttered. The night was like a soothing hand laid on the brow.

Brown did not climb to the poop. She was not a passenger; she belonged to the ship, and had earned her privacy. This was her time off, which was good in every job, freeing you from those for whom you worked, giving sanctuary and escape. She strolled amidships, the deck so familiar beneath her busy feet by now that she could have walked it with her eyes closed. Jens Larsen, off-duty too, stood there, tall and still, like a piece of the *Albatros*. He was smoking his pipe, which made a little red eye in the dark. She went and stood beside him. He acknowledged her presence with a welcoming nod, seen against the stars, and she smiled up at him. Her face was lost in the darkness, but that didn't matter. Although her Danish was still elementary, sometimes they contrived to chatter with animation. Not to-night, however. She found these men of the sea surprisingly quick to understand a mood. Perhaps that was because they were so simple and unmuddled inside. Stewardess and mate stood peacefully, side by side, taking their ease together, making no demands on each other, rocked, thought Brown smiling happily to herself, in the cradle of the deep.

VI

The morning sunlight filled the room with golden warmth, and showed off his treasures to great advantage, yet Captain Sorensen sat as if frozen, seeing only the strange and monstrous figure on the other side of the table.

Until that moment the interview had gone quite smoothly. Himmelmann seemed to have learnt a lesson last night. He had come in a placatory mood, and had been as surprised and impressed as anyone else at the master's fine quarters. They had talked in German—a language in which Sorensen

was fluent, having had years of practice—and the captain had made no secret of what a good war he had had in Denmark during the occupation. There was nothing to be ashamed of in that, and if he had been frank with the Englander, Trevellion, he could afford to be even franker with this German born in Argentina. His frankness, naturally, took a somewhat different line. He did not tell Himmelmann that the Germans lost all their wars, but he did express regret that the best side had lost by such a narrow margin, and he made it very clear that he had known where his duty lay as a real Danish patriot who faced facts and was a man of intelligence with the courage of his convictions.

Himmelmann had listened with the closest attention, putting in a shrewd question at intervals, eager to hear details. He had forgotten his own misery and distress in finding that the master of the *Albatros* was such an admirable character.

And then quite suddenly he had leaned forward and made the announcement which had changed everything. He had spoken hushed and deep down in his throat, yet the four words still trembled in the air as an electric vibration.

They went on and on; they would not stop—though he had spoken very secretly, for Sorensen's ears alone.

Time ticked by. Seconds? Minutes? An age of time ticked by. Erik Ole Sorensen found his voice at last, but then only enough voice to say a word.

"You?"

It did not occur to him to doubt or question. He accepted the incredible assertion. It had been made with such complete conviction. Perhaps if a man had sat in the other chair it might have been otherwise. One would have started to compare features, to look for the resemblance even though it might be disguised. But the doctor was not a human being. Arms, shoulders and head were so swathed in bandages that it was as if he wore a clumsy and grotesque suit of armour —even more than that: he was like a sentry sitting inside a white fort looking out through slits in the defences, ensconced, impregnable. Through one aperture his pale eyes glittered, lashes and brows scorched away; through another blackened nostrils and lips showed. You couldn't question or doubt that invulnerable creature, who wasn't Dr. Himmelmann or anyone else at all you could imagine in the barque *Albatros*, who wasn't flesh and blood.

"You are he?" croaked Sorensen, and now he contrived to start to his feet, but he had to cling to the edge of his fine table for support, and he could not straighten up. He leant there stiffly.

"Sit," said Himmelmann.

"But——?" said Sorensen. Words wouldn't come to his dry tongue from his parched throat. What words were there for this situation?

"Sit," ordered Himmelmann.

The master of the *Albatros* was extremely glad to obey. He was one not easily upset, but now his knees were trembling and the support of the chair was a boon. He squatted, huddled forward, black eyes round and fixed, a toad before a snake, terrified, bemused, hypnotised.

Himmelmann allowed another arctic silence to settle in the room which had been warm with the morning light. He enjoyed it: now he was a snowman with eyes which were alive, a cold, white, motionless snowman, with human hands. No end to the fancies which chased through Sorensen's dazed mind.

Presently Himmelmann relented.

"As you see I have been impressed by what you have told me of your record, deeply impressed," he said, "or I should never have revealed my great secret to you. Now let me tell you something more about myself, and it is my command —my solemn and final command—that you remember every word from now on only, and, publicly, act accordingly."

Sorensen regained enough control of his muscles to incline his head in acceptance and homage.

Himmelmann began to speak slowly and emphatically, delivering a lecture to a dull student who had to be taught with laborious care.

"My name is Rudolf Himmelmann, and I was born in Buenos Ayres of German parents and am a citizen of Argentina. These things you already know from papers in my pockets. I lived in Argentina until 1936, when I went to Germany to complete my education at the University of Heidelberg. On graduating I joined the staff as a science teacher. I was there when war broke out, and continued in my post until 1944 when the authorities, although I was the subject of a friendly neutral nation, had the audacity and wickedness to charge me with subversive opinions and

actions. My country's representatives and I protested against this crime which violated all the rules of civilised life. In vain. The Gestapo took me away, and with barely the semblance of a trial I was flung into the horrors of Belsen. All this is clear?"

Sorensen's head bent again, but his eyes remained fixed and his lips did not move.

"I remained there until the glorious liberators set me free. I was much changed. Who wouldn't be after such treatment? I was broken in health, almost blind, wearing dark glasses. There were weals on my back where the whips of the monsters had slashed me. My mind had been marred, my learning forgotten, my spirit broken. I could teach no more. I did not want to go back to Heidelberg. I wanted to shake the dust of hateful Germany from my feet. My one wish when I had staggered back to life was to return to my native country. It was a natural and laudable ambition. The great and victorious United Nations had nothing but joy in helping an intellectual who had been broken on the Nazi wheel, crucified by the new barbarians. They lavished care and attention on me. I gave interviews which shocked the world with their scholarly revelation of horrors. I was honoured and nursed, and, at last, given my wish. A place was found for me in the 'plane. You know the rest."

"Yes, my——" began Captain Sorensen, but Dr. Himmelmann cut him short with a sharp, almost feminine cry.

"Ach," he said, eyes blazing in fury, "do I waste my words on a madman? Have you no ears, you dolt, you idiot? You claim to be a man of cunning and discretion. As such I judge you. And yet I find you no better than a half-witted child. Who am I you address? Who am I?" He shook his fist and the white bludgeon of his arm at Sorensen.

A shiver ran through Sorensen, though he was no easy man to frighten.

"You are Doctor Himmelmann, Doctor Himmelmann," he said hastily. "You are Doctor Himmelmann, and no more and no less."

The storm passed.

"Come, that is better," said the doctor. "There is no other Doctor Rudolf Himmelmann alive—that I can promise you."

"I am sure of that, doctor," said Sorensen. The significance of the words appealed to him. They were the kind of joke he relished. He even found himself smiling a little, and didn't feel it necessary to check what might have been an impertinence, for his guest liked to see a man with a proper sense of humour. The pale eyes told him that.

"I shall claim no special privileges—such as the use of this cabin, and you will treat me like any other passenger, but you will, of course, take your orders from me."

"Of course, doctor." The master of the *Albatros* heard himself say that with astonishment. In just a little chat he had been dethroned; he was no longer in command of the ship he owned; a usurper they had fished out of the sea sat in his place. An amazing situation, but there was nothing he could do about it.

"You will make a new course immediately which will bring us to the nearest big city in South America, or at least to a place where I can get a 'plane."

"There is Natal in Brazil. I think the 'planes call there."

"Yes, yes," said Dr. Himmelmann. "I think that is so. How long?"

"It depends on the weather, doctor. Perhaps a week."

"It must be sooner. Much sooner. Every hour is important. I do not believe your medical-student steward has the necessary skill. I must have the best doctors in the world. You must be quick! You must be quick!" His words hurried faster; his voice climbed and thinned. "My face," he cried. "What is under these bandages? What kind of a horror am I to wear as a face for the rest of my life? My face! My face!"

The strange and clumsy figure toppled forward suddenly and lay on the table, hands clenched, muffled arms spread wide, sobbing bitterly.

This collapse had a peculiar effect on Captain Sorensen. The stiffness and constraint went out of him. He sat back in his chair suddenly; he grinned; he drew his thumb slowly down his cheek to his chin and down again and down again, in the gesture of one who thinks deeply. The weeping, broken figure did not look at all like Dr. Himmelmann who gave the orders aboard the *Albatros*.

The sun shone in.

There was a lot of thinking to be done.

"Come, doctor," said Captain Sorensen presently when the worst of the paroxysm had spent itself. "You are still sick. You have over-taxed yourself. Let me take you back to your cabin now and you must rest."

"Yes," said Dr. Himmelmann, "Yes, I am sick—very sick. You are a good friend, captain."

CHAPTER THREE

I

MR. BRAMERTON did not remember such moonlight since he was on holiday in the bush in his native Australia. But then it was many a year since he had time or inclination to notice moonlight. Life had been too busy, too full.

Although the moon was still young, the sky was so clear and the air so clean that its radiance flooded the hushed and empty world and turned the *Albatros* into a silver ship set in a sheet of silver. It almost seemed as if no breeze would ever blow again. Mr. Bramerton didn't mind. He needed rest, a lot of rest. It was good to be still, physically, mentally and spiritually becalmed, in the hot serene night and dream of this and that, with no plans to work out, no decisions to take, no appointments to keep, no secretaries intruding. Just to sit.

The youngsters were dotted about him, gossiping. They were pleasant people. The girl Magda was a constant delight to the eye, but little else. However, to delight the eye had been the objective of legions of artists of all kinds, working with desperate industry, burning themselves up in search of inspiration, trying to capture the elusive quality of beauty. Magda was lucky: she didn't have to do anything at all.

Queer to include Mlle Armande among the young people, because she was a cultured woman of the world, a journalist of international repute, who seemed to speak and think in any language at will. But that silver hair played a trick. It wiped the years from her face. Trevellion was a clever fellow, too. Mr. Bramerton admired his kind of mind, but couldn't use it commercially. The little stewardess, Kathie Brown, was a most excellent young woman. She should have made nursing her profession. He intended to show his appreciation of what she had done for him in a most practical fashion. In Kathie Brown there was someone whom a millionaire could help. The others had no need of him.

He ceased to listen, and his thoughts wandered back to his own youth.

On such a night as this he had kissed Ruby under the golden wattles by the chuckling waters of the Yarra in the hills outside Melbourne. He had forgotten the name of the township —why, he couldn't have been more than seventeen!—but he hadn't forgotten Ruby. She had had a firm, white body like a sapling, tiny breasts, and an ardent mouth. She was the only daughter of the wealthy local storekeeper, and he could have married her, and, ultimately, the business. To-day he might have been Ruby's father over again, and mayor of the little town, whatever its name was. They would have had a flock of children and grandchildren. There had been no children as a result of their brief, fierce springtime of love, and he hadn't married her. Even then the power moved in him, and drove him on. No small bush town for him. The world was his field.

Perhaps if he had married Ruby, Bramerton's General Stores would have spread across the face of the continent? That was a possibility, but more probably early security would have killed his peculiar genius.

Ruby would be a woman of over sixty now. That was hard to realise. Doubtless she was a grandmother. Who was the mayor? Who ran the general store? Who slept beside Ruby though the tides of Spring no longer leapt in her veins?

"You were born in Australia, weren't you, Mr. Bramerton?" asked Mlle Armande, who seemed to know everything about everybody.

The question chimed with his thoughts.

"Very much so," he said. "I was just remembering the fact which I'd almost forgotten in the rush and hustle."

"Then what kind of a place is this Port Lincoln?" said Trevellion. "Or is that like asking 'Do you know my friend Smith of London?'"

"I've been there," said Mr. Bramerton. "The Broken Hill people have a big smelting plant at Port Lincoln. I'm associated with them, of course. They took me down there. It's on the—on the Spencer Gulf. I'm afraid I don't remember much about it, though I could probably give you quite a few figures about the works. But the town itself—I seem to recall it as very hot and sandy, small houses straggling about, goats, friendly sort of people, in front the green of the gulf, behind the brown of the desert. Oh, yes, and the jetty, of course, with sailing-ships like this tied up

at it. I was a very active man then. I shuddered at the thought of travelling in one."

"And here you are doing it," said Magda. "But, of course, I suppose you'll buy the ship, or something, and bring us all to some place that's near, and get back to making lots more money?"

"I sometimes feel I've made enough," Mr. Bramerton said. "Particularly on a night like this. There's a limit to what a man can spend—unless of course he marries and divorces often enough."

"Have you ever been married or divorced, Mr. Bramerton?" Magda's interest had been captured immediately.

"Five times," he admitted.

The others politely veiled their astonishment, but Magda clapped her hands.

"Well, can you beat that?" she cried. "Why, Mr. Bramerton, to look at you you'd never think you'd even so much——"

"I doubt if the captain would sell, anyway," Trevellion interposed hastily, protectively. He was obviously bewitched by her beauty—which was natural enough—but she gave him unhappy moments in other directions.

"I doubt it, too."

"Of course he's got pots of money," said Magda. "Look at that love-nest of his!"

"And he's stubborn and proud," said Mr. Bramerton. "He puts his ship and his real business first."

"And that is proper," said Mlle Armande, her English showing no trace of accent. "The captain of a ship should be like that. We little passengers are just so much live cargo she carries on her back. The ship should be his only love. Look at her."

They looked at the *Albatros* in the moonlight, and saw that Mlle Armande was right. They felt small and insignificant, dwarfed by the soaring beauty of the masts, and the night of which she was a part.

"You are clever to know that, mademoiselle," said Brown. "I love the *Albatros*."

"But then you loved Paris, too, Kathie," teased Trevellion. "You seem to specialise in loving the scenes of your labours."

"Perhaps I do."

"It's a good, safe kind of love, and very useful," said Mlle Armande.

"Not my idea of *l'amour,*" Magda said.

She hadn't meant it to be funny, but it went very well as a joke. When you laughed at Magda, however, you had to laugh with her, too. Only a blind man could have done otherwise. Magda was delighted at the success of what, it appeared, had been a witty sally. She knew she wasn't clever, but she also knew she was good fun. Gentlemen were always telling her so—Martin Trevellion was the latest.

Mr. Bramerton gave her a special smile all for herself. She valued a millionaire's smile, and he was glad to make her the present, for she did him a service every time he looked at her. He had been surrounded for years by lovely things. She was one.

"Doctor Himmelmann is very anxious to be put ashore as soon as possible," said Brown. "You can't blame him with those awful burns."

"He'll need to be better pleader than I was," said Trevellion. "I remember when I tried to beg and reason with Captain Sorensen. He put me in my place properly."

"But you're not so keen for the trip to end now, Martin?" said Magda.

"Not quite so keen," he admitted, eyes bright for her.

"And what about you, Magda?" Mlle Armande enquired innocently.

"Oh, you can get used to anything if the company's all right," said Magda. "I've been on worse boats."

"I think, you know, we might all be sorry if the voyage ended to-morrow," said Mr. Bramerton. "We can do with a change from that world back there. I know I can. But that is quite a point, about this Himmelmann's burns. Are they really bad, Miss Brown?"

"Only Jorgen has seen them. He wouldn't let me. He says they're awful."

"Then surely——?"

"But he also says that no specialist on earth could do any more for him."

"Is the doctor a nice kind of gentleman?" asked Magda.

"I'm afraid I don't find him so," said Brown, "but then you shouldn't expect too much, I suppose, of a man who mayn't have a face."

"Ugh!" said Magda, "this is giving me the creeps. What about a walk, Martin?"

"Why, certainly," Martin agreed, springing up with alacrity.

Mr. Bramerton didn't blame him. Had he been forty, twenty years younger, he would not have sat there on the populated poop with Magda for any time at all.

He sighed, and in the moonlight his thoughts went back through time to Ruby on the banks of the river, the proper name of which was Yarra-Yarra. It meant "ever-flowing" in the language of the blackfellows.

II

Down below in the fo'c'sle the Danes made music.

It must have been hot and smelly in there, but Martin had learnt from Brown that sailors didn't relish wide skies and sea. When at leisure they preferred to shut themselves in the fuggy wooden box of their home, sitting on bunks and sea-chests—cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in—choked with the fumes of tobacco and their own bodies. They saw all they wanted of the ocean when they were on watch.

Their muffled music came faint and lovely, though it consisted only of an accordion, the tap of home-made drums and the twang of stringed instruments which hadn't been bought in any shop but devised by the carpenter. They didn't caterwaul the broadcast hit of a month ago, but harmonised strange, lilting songs with the beat of the sea in them, songs which sounded as if they had been handed down from the days when their ancestors had voyaged in long galleys to collect Danegeld.

In this flat calm no look-out was posted on the fo'c'sle-head, and no sailor would bother to intrude. The poop lay the whole length of the ship away. The triangle of wood was an isolated island floating in the glitter of the moon. They were a thousand miles from the world. The bows closed in before them, and the jib-boom rose, a pointing, arrested finger.

No need to speak a word to Magda now, no need to hear a word from her. They were two bodies escaped into space. Beyond the clutter of the great iron chains and capstan—where once upon a time he had jumped with Kathie Brown

and bumped his head—they dropped down together on the clean planks. All about the immensity of sea and sky, below and far away the Danes singing their ancient, haunting airs, and that most fortunate of mortals, Martin Trevellion, with Aphrodite, risen from the foam, in his arms.

A moment without peer in all his wide experience.

III

Captain Sorensen appeared to be gloating on a tiny naked ivory girl, two inches of perfection, who stood on the table before him, caught in a pose of gay abandon. She was another of his toys, his treasures, but at the moment he didn't see her. He sat back in his chair and meditatively blew a series of smoke-rings. He had plenty to think about: there was that Himmelmann, there was that Magda. They were pieces in a game of chess in which one had the choice of many moves. As yet he couldn't make up his mind which were the right ones, but he enjoyed the problem. He was completely master of the business of running his ship, and his astute and devious mind welcomed further occupation.

One thing he had established to his own satisfaction. Whoever Himmelmann might be, his arrogant assumption of authority had lasted only for those first few startled moments. Himmelmann didn't know it, but the only man to give orders aboard the *Albatros* was Erik Ole Sorensen. In this little world he was the Führer. It was good to know that, and amusing in the circumstances. But what move to make with that chessman? Perhaps the most interesting consideration was that Himmelmann offered a chance to bring the name Erik Ole Sorensen before the eyes of all the world, and even write it in the history books. After such a good war there was no need to think of Himmelmann merely as a possible source of money. He had far greater potentialities. One might carve a tombstone out of him which would endure long after that personal Doomsday which otherwise would mean the end of everything.

Notoriety, fame, did not come to many sea-captains, but none of the others was Erik Ole Sorensen for whom things went well.

And Magda? That was a pretty puzzle in every sense of the word. He was pleased by it, and the joke he had made.

His grin widened. Let the Englander get on with his ardent courtship. He thought a lot of himself, that one. He needed taking down a peg or two. And Erik Ole Sorensen was just the man to do it. When Trevellion thought the prize was his he would discover his mistake. Captain Sorensen had every confidence in his charms and wealth and the powers conferred on him by his position as ruler of the *Albatros*. It was better fun to wait a little while, just a little while longer. Such a fine gentleman, with such fine airs and graces, but he wasn't any match for Captain Sorensen.

He clamped his lips together, and frowned. His musings had been interrupted by the entrance of Himmelmann, uninvited, unannounced. Pulling the curtain aside he stepped in, heavily, slowly, white and unhuman, wearing the uniform of the grave.

"That is a pretty thing you have there," he said.

"Prettier than you," said Captain Sorensen, who didn't like to be disturbed.

The pale eyes considered him through the slit.

"Yet you wouldn't have had it but for me," he said.

"Who knows?" mocked Captain Sorensen.

"I know," said Himmelmann, "and you know, too, my friend."

"All I know is that you are Doctor Himmelmann whose life I saved. You have not given me any little statues."

"I gave you all you have," said Himmelmann. "But I am not here for this kind of talk. I have come to ask, when will the weather change and the wind blow?"

"Ask God," said Captain Sorensen, deliberately rude.

His visitor wanted to storm and bully, but dared not. Sorensen saw that, and was interested and amused.

"I admit you cannot help the ship being becalmed," Himmelmann said, suddenly ingratiating, and then his eyes glittered. "There is no sign of a break?"

"None, doctor."

"It is bad, very bad," Himmelmann fretted. "My face! I must have real doctors. You have not forgotten my orders that we are to get to South America at the earliest possible moment?"

"Be sure I haven't forgotten who gives orders aboard the *Albatros*," said Captain Sorensen, allowing his mouth to stretch. He rose and put on his cap, terminating the inter-

view. "And now I go on deck, and you to your bunk. In your own interests you should not be up, and all the worrying in the world will change nothing. When the wind comes the proper orders will be given."

Himmelmann wanted to argue and storm, but he was no fool. He had begun to realise certain facts, too. He saw a game of chess might be afoot, and he didn't want to make any wrong moves. Sorensen enjoyed the moment.

"I count on you, my dear captain," said Himmelmann. "I count on you. You are a good friend to me, and it will not be forgotten. I know you will do your best, your very best."

"My very best," said Captain Sorensen on the same note of false warmth, but he did not say in what manner or for whom.

Himmelmann shuffled across the deserted saloon and back to his cabin, and Captain Sorensen went out on deck and climbed to the poop where he spoke a few needless words to the mate, avoiding the group of passengers. So Magda and the Englander were not up here? He padded down again, he padded forward, carpet slippers making no sound.

The fool of a bosun came out of the fo'c'sle carrying a bucket on a length of rope.

"Good evening, captain," he said, his voice ringing loud in the quiet. "The night is hot."

"It is hot," agreed Captain Sorensen, careful not to betray his anger.

There were scuffling sounds above. Well, the mischief was done. He climbed the ladder. The Englander and Magda had just had time to drape themselves innocently on the rail where they appeared to be enjoying the play of the moonlight on the still ocean.

"So? You are here?" said Captain Sorensen, surprised. "It is goodt here, yes?"

"Beautiful," said Magda, rather breathlessly.

"Grand," said Trevellion.

"I am glad that you are. Here I come to smoke the cigar, and I have not any light. Perhaps you give me one?" He took out his case. "You will smoke, too?"

"A cigarette, thanks," said Trevellion.

"And for me, Martin," said Magda.

The Englander fumbled and produced cigarettes and

lighter. He hated having to do so because he was still shaky about their narrow escape. Try as he did he couldn't stop his hand trembling as he offered the flame.

"Is your health goodt?" asked Captain Sorensen solicitously. "I am thinking perhaps you get a touch of fever from the night air?"

"No, no, nothing like that," said Martin. "We've been leaning on the rail quite a while. My arm's gone to sleep."

"So that is what you say? Gone to sleep? I must remember him. It is the cramp, yes?"

"Yes," said Martin.

"Life in a ship that too is very cramped. See, I make a joke."

They all laughed together, and Magda said, "Oh, captain, you are wizard—you and your jokes!"

"Yes," said Captain Sorensen happily, "it is goodt to be all funny together. The moonlight, Magda, is becoming to you. It makes your eyes to shine."

"You say the cutest things, captain," said Magda, "but then sailors are always tops, aren't they?"

"Oh, yes," said Captain Sorensen.

Were they? He had said and done some cute things, but it was rather surprising that the Englander had been leaning so long on the rail that his arm had gone to sleep. With whom had his arm gone to sleep? Sorensen enjoyed making his private English joke, but he didn't enjoy its implications. Although he smiled of course, he was thoughtful. His smoke-rings drifted away. The night was as still as that. Smoke-rings on the fo'c'sle-head? Come, that was something!

"To-morrow is Sunday," he said, cheerfully. "At sea almost we forget the days of the week there are so many things to think about—and do. You, very lovely Magda, must come and have a drink with me just after noon. I serve a special cocktail for you—with a kick. See, I haven't forgotten the English slang you teach me. You, I don't ask you, Mr. Trevellion, because I think you are more sick than you know. You are the famous writer and clever man, as the Miss told me weeks ago, but to-night you have not been very goodt with your sayings and—and——"

"Wisecracks," Magda supplied.

"My thanks to you, Magda. As I have said my English is too school-book. Wisecracks—that is the English slang.

You have been with me like just a scurried schoolboy, Mr. Trevellion. Or don't I find the right words? Only I am feeling you are not yourself at all. So that is why I don't ask you."

"I don't want your cocktails, captain," said Trevellion. "I keep the Sabbath holy."

"You see what I mean?" said Captain Sorensen. "That is just sulky and silly. But still you are not asked."

"Let's go, Magda," said Trevellion. "It's getting late and you must be sleepy."

"Me, I am sleepy, too. It is goodt to sleep."

He yawned, and bowed them off the fo'c'sle-head.

IV

Mlle Armande looked at her English cigarette.

"This is a queer and remarkable vessel," she said to Brown in French. "To think what this would be worth, even now, in our Paris, and yet here we smoke it in a Danish ship at English prices, and on signing a chit are trusted to pay at last when the voyage is done."

They were in their cabin, wearing absurd pyjamas, the smallest they could get from the slop-chest. Brown perched on the edge of her upper bunk, and Mlle Armande below. Their feet were bare: there were no refinements like mules, or even the most workaday slippers, aboard the *Albatros*.

"That's because of Captain Sorensen," said Brown. "He manages things very well."

"He does."

"You know he was a collaborator?"

"He told me. I, of course, despise him. I must. Yet I tell you this, Kathie: to my mind he is one of the most honest men I know."

Brown gave a gasp of surprise.

"*You* think him honest? Why, I could never have imagined that! He is good to me because I am useful, but I've never thought of him as—as honest."

"You're young and very clean," said Mlle Armande. "It's all simple to you—black is black, and white is white. But I am older and sadder and more experienced. I say our captain is an honest man because he makes no secret of the fact that he is a villain. He would sell his mother's soul to

the devil if it amused or profited him, but he would tell her, quite frankly, that he was doing so. That's why he's honest. Of course, it isn't a good example of what I mean, for his mother would forgive him, anyway. They always do. At least to collaborate so very successfully, and then boast about it—that shows character. So many, many people have done otherwise. You see?"

"Yes," said Brown, "I think I do."

"You do," said Mlle Armande.

A knock at the door, and Magda entered. She was shining and bright as Venus, the star: she was lovely as the goddess. The atmosphere of the cabin changed: it warmed, it glowed.

"Oh," said Magda, recalling her previous success, "*l'amour, l'amour, l'amour.*"

She closed the door and leant against it. Neither Mlle Armande nor Brown could laugh on this occasion. What Magda said didn't matter. She was *l'amour*, no matter how she pronounced or used the word. Mlle Armande took out a cigarette, lit it at her own, and tossed it over. Magda caught it neatly.

"You don't have to tell us," Mlle Armande said. "Let us guess."

"I wasn't going to tell you."

"You don't have to, you superb and silly creature," said Mlle Armande. "We only have to look at you. I envy you. Or do I?"

"You should," said Magda. "He's wizard. But simply wizard."

"Who wouldn't be—with you?" asked Mlle Armande.

"And you're wizard," said Magda, leaning against the door, a picture, a statue, "not to be jealous."

"Somehow I couldn't be," said Brown.

"It wouldn't do us any good," said Mlle Armande.

"You both think I'm a chump, don't you?" said Magda.

"We both think you're the loveliest thing," said Mlle Armande, "and you know it."

"But I'm not clever and wise like you are. I'm only just me. I'm in love again. I generally seem to be, but it doesn't get me anywhere in the end. I go on modelling. Have you ever been in love, mamsel?"

"I am a Frenchwoman, working only with my mind," said Mlle Armande. "That's not an easy thing to be. There

are very few of us. We are backward in France about things like that. A Frenchwoman like me can't afford luxuries."

"I don't get it," Magda admitted. "What about you, Kathie?"

Brown considered.

"I think I was for a while," she said, "but it didn't work out. It was in Paris."

"Ah, gay Paree!" said Magda.

"Tell us, do!—if you want to," said Mlle Armande.

"Well, like most of my stories it's simple and hardly worth telling."

"Martin doesn't think that," said Magda. "He says you're always amusing because you're so honest. He says that but for your way of telling stories he'd never have met me, because he'd never have been on this boat."

"That's true, too," Brown said, "though I hadn't thought of it. If we hadn't been talking he would have been sending his wireless message and none of this would have happened."

"Wireless to whom?" asked Magda, interested.

"I told you," said Brown.

"Oh, her," said Magda, no longer interested.

"But the man in Paris?" Mlle Armande prompted.

"Yes," said Magda, "romance always goes over well with me, particularly to-night."

"His name was Camille, and though it won't sound silly to you, mademoiselle, it does to me having to say it."

"I speak English," said Mlle Armande. "It is a funny name to you."

"It was years and years ago, of course, before the war, and I was so much younger then, like the rest of us. I was an infant. I used to go with the other English girls to the Moulin Rouge, and we used to dance with the French boys. They were very nice to us. None of them mattered to me, though they mattered a lot to some of the others. Then Camille came along, just by chance, and I danced with him as I did with the others, but he was different. We laughed a lot together, and we shared jokes. Always on Fridays, only Fridays. I know, mademoiselle, that the French are very witty, and all that, but it isn't often an English girl can laugh at the same jokes with a Frenchman, and find life fun."

Mlle Armande considered that.

"I think you are very right there," she said.

"He was a lawyer of some kind. I never quite sorted that out. It didn't matter. He was a lot older than me then. I suppose he was—oh, twenty-eight. He wasn't specially handsome. But he was fun. Dancing, sitting down at the table, it was lovely. You know, mademoiselle, that Paris is the town where all the dance tunes come to die, so happily."

"No, I didn't know that," said Mlle Armande. "I only know that poor old joke about rich Americans. No citizen of a town ever knows the truth."

"And it is true," said Brown. "That year the tune was 'Love in Bloom.' Girls who came across to new jobs laughed at us for thinking it was the hit of the moment. They said it had passed out in England six months before. And Americans told us it belonged back with 'Alexander's Ragtime Band.' But it was a lovely thing. It was ours."

"I am glad to hear that about the old tunes," said Mlle Armande. "I like that idea. And your Camille?"

"He was the only one. The other boys came and went. I had nothing to give them, as you see. But no matter how many girls there were to choose from, Camille was always for me. And we laughed and were happy. He made me dance very well, and I've never pretended to be much of a dancer, though I loved it. With him it was different. We could do any dance."

Magda said, "It's a lovely feeling, isn't it? I've often had it."

"I've only had it once. With Camille. I know it's silly, because there were much younger and better-looking men, who, I suppose, danced better, but when Camille and I were on the floor there was nobody else to touch us, at least to me. And we laughed at nothing. Silly, isn't it?"

"Oh, no," said Magda, "if you can make a man laugh that's half the battle. I always do."

"Why is the story so sad then?" asked Mlle Armande.

"Because," said Brown, "one night we managed to get away from the others and Camille became serious. He said he had money and a future, and he asked me why didn't I live with him. He could set me up in an apartment, and I could stop having to look after other people's children and there would be nothing else for us to do except love each other. It was quite a flattering offer seeing I was just a

governess, and he was a lawyer or whatever he was. A lot of the girls had similar arrangements with men who weren't Camille. It was a lovely thing to think of, sitting there at our small, all-alone table in the Moulin Rouge. You must understand, mademoiselle, that I had been a good girl until then."

"Oh, that I understand," said Mlle Armande, smiling.

"So that, although Camille was the only man in my life I had ever wanted to go to bed with, I felt a bit unhappy. If he had said, 'Kathie, marry me!' I think I should have burst with joy. But even this offer, seeing he was a Frenchman and so different, if you know what I mean, mademoiselle——"

"I know what you mean, Kathie."

"—Even this offer was, well, heavenly. Because I had been waiting for Camille for a long time, while I was going on working. But I was still just me, and I hesitated."

"You were cuckoo," said Magda. "If you liked the guy all that much. What had you to lose?"

"Nothing," said Brown. "Only still I didn't feel quite happy about it. I suppose I was very English and very much in love. Oh, if he'd only asked me to marry him——! How we'd have laughed, and been married! But he hadn't. It was this other thing, which, of course, didn't shock me or anything. The same proposal was put up to some girl a dozen times a night there, probably. But it was Camille and me and that made it different. Camille saw I was hesitating. And he said, mademoiselle, with the best intentions in the world, 'But, Kathie, what are you worrying about? You are safe with me, you are sure of me. I am a happily married man with three children. I come here on Friday nights because then my dear wife goes to her mother. So, you see, in me you have someone you can rely on.'"

"He came clean, didn't he?" said Magda.

"And so," said Mlle Armande, "another old air died in Paris?"

"Yes," said Brown. "I told you it was a silly, pointless story."

"It's sad," said Magda. "You must have been a very simple kid."

"I was."

"I think it's a very happy story," said Mlle Armande.

"I'm glad Camille didn't get the English girl. It wouldn't have worked at all."

"Oh, no," said Brown, "not like that."

"Nor any other way. No people understand each other less than the English and the French, though there is only that little strip of water between us. I know just how Camille felt, and I can sympathise with him. But that for you—never!"

"Never!" said Brown.

"Give me an Englishman every time," said Magda. "You know where you are with an Englishman, or an American."

"Or do you?" asked Mlle Armande.

"I generally do," said Magda.

"Oh, you——!" laughed Mlle Armande. "You're a freak."

"A freak?" Magda was amazed.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean like the fat lady in the circus. I mean you could get over with anybody regardless. You're as international as the Venus de Milo or La Source. You could even throw your net over the most interesting and difficult man on the *Albatros*."

Magda shone. "I have," she said.

"Oh, no you haven't—yet."

"Meaning who?"

"The captain," said Mlle Armande. "There's a queer one, ugly, strange, hypnotic. I'll admit he fascinates me."

"You?" said Magda, impressed.

"Why not, Magda? The ugly, mysterious men are always the most exciting."

"They are, too," Magda decided, still turning the point over. "Yes, there is something about the captain, I mean even apart from the love-nest. Funnily enough he's asked me to have cocktails with him to-morrow. What would you do if you were me, mamsel?"

"As I haven't the luck to be," said Mlle Armande, "I haven't the foggiest notion, except that I'd go to bed and get my beauty sleep for the cocktail-party."

"That's an idea," said Magda. "I don't want to look worn out, do I? And I might—in view of everything!" She confided the whole story to them in a single wink.

"I don't think you would, Magda," said Mlle Armande,

"but you had better be careful. Captain Sorensen has sharp eyes."

"You're right," she said. "Remember what the fortune-teller told me, Kathie?"

"I do, indeed."

"What was that?"

"She's a wonder. She told me back in London she saw Martin looking through a wedding-ring."

Mlle Armande was grave, and impressed.

"She must be a wonder, indeed," she said.

"I feel as if I could jump over the moon," said Magda. "Imagine me as Mrs. Martin Trevellion! But, mind you, mamsel, that's a point about the dear Cap. Well, nighty-night, ducks!"

They stubbed their cigarettes, and Magda turned out the lamp. She went away, and dark and quiet descended on the cabin and the temperature dropped to normal. Mlle Armande and Brown curled down in their bunks.

"Despite that 'wizard' fortune-teller, I've given our Magda something else to think about," laughed Mlle Armande. "Her eyes will be opened now to the immediate charms of Captain Sorensen. And he will know just how to play his cards, that one. I admire Martin Trevellion, and have great respect for his talents—his genius, if you like. It would be quite a tragedy if the boredom of the sea and the body beautiful delivered him finally into the arms of the divine Magda."

"I didn't think you were catty," said Brown.

"I'm not," said Mlle Armande, "but I'm a practical Frenchwoman, just as your Camille was a practical Frenchman. He's a great catch, that Trevellion. Either you or I should marry him before the voyage is over. Which shall it be, Kathie?"

Brown was sleepy.

"I don't even begin to want to marry Mr. Trevellion," she said. "You make me laugh, mademoiselle."

"So did Camille," said Mlle Armande. "You have been warned. Good night, English Miss."

"Good night, mademoiselle," said Brown.

V

Sunday should have been like any other day. There was nothing to distinguish it: no church bells chimed, no service was held, the routine of the ship went on in its immemorial groove. Yet so strong was the discipline of the calendar that it remained the Sabbath. A sense of deeper hush descended on the *Albatros*, which had been quiet all the week in the grip of the calm, and her people, though they had no Sunday clothes to wear nor any need for them, seemed different in some subtle way, Sundayish.

Martin welcomed the thought. He was beginning to feel things again, his sensibilities were coming back, soon he would be at work. He had Magda to thank for melting away the salty crust in which the sea had coated him. He felt alive and alert; the warm sun was good, the cloudless sky and the polished plain of the sea delighted the eye. Had he ever found life dull, stupid and boring aboard the *Albatros*? He walked to the rail and stood gazing out into the blue. From old habit he tried to conjure up Mercia. She was too far away: she was lost. He dwelt on a different planet now where a new life had been established. That old love story was a book which was closed. It had been dropped overboard and had drowned in the ocean. Who could have thought that end would be written so abruptly, with such finality?

Well, romances didn't always end in an organ pealing Mendelssohn. You used to see the announcements in *The Times*, though this one would have to be rather differently worded: The marriage which Mr. Martin Trevellion has been trying so hard to arrange with the remote Lady Mercia will not now take place. He has found a brighter, warmer, much more attainable star close at hand, and he is happy to say he has hitched his waggon to it with most exciting and satisfactory results.

To give Mercia her due she would have smiled on reading that.

Soothing, not to have to fume any more about Nigel or Bruce or Guy, or worry about the jade telephone incessantly ringing, or frown about the cars waiting outside the house in Brook Street.

Whatever Mercia had been doing last night was no concern of his. Last night belonged to Magda.

So it wasn't always a case of, Never the time and the place and the loved one all together? For no setting could have been more beautiful than that up in the bows until the toad hopped in. Sorensen was a hateful creature. He had taken such joy in spoiling the hour. It would have served him right if he'd got a punch on the jaw, captain and all. That sort of violent behaviour wasn't Martin's line of country. Still, feeling as fit as he did this morning, so aware of his body, it was a happy fancy. Smack, right to the jaw!—and there was Sorensen flat on the deck, Martin Trevellion standing over him, triumphant.

Martin was amused at his own imaginings. And pleased by them. Better to dream like a schoolboy, than be old and blasé and too, too sophisticated.

Something would have to be done about Sorensen, however, if he kept hopping in. It was hard to know what. The master of any ship was in a very unassailable position, and the master of the *Albatros* in addition was oddly formidable and menacing. He couldn't be abolished by something direct and simple like a blow. Arouse his enmity, and there would be plenty of trouble.

The nerve of him, asking Magda to his cabin to drink cocktails! Martin decided to forbid her to go. No, that would be foolish. The toad would be annoyed, and there was no limit to what he could do. He could have you locked in your cabin, put in irons, anything. Magda would handle the situation. Though her beauty was a lure, it was also a powerful weapon. It would prevail, even against Captain Sorensen. And it was humiliating, disgusting, even to think of the toad as a possible rival—an insult to Magda, and to himself.

He was jerked out of his considerations, and the Sabbath hush was shattered, by a sudden commotion on the main deck, a rumble of Danish voices, a wave of excitement.

Martin swung about. Hands pointed, necks craned.

The wall of space which had encased them so long had been broken. Out there on the line of the horizon masts and the tops of two smoking funnels had appeared, rising strangely, fantastically, above the curve of the world which still hid the hull. Surely the old voyagers must have been very dull if they ever saw a ship like that and went on thinking the world was flat? The ocean ceased to be a plain and ran downhill in a smooth bulge up and across which the

steamer climbed towards them. The *Albatros* rested on the top, waited.

It was as if the director had shouted, "Action! Camera!"

"Take One," Martin murmured, out of long experience.

But there had been no rehearsal of this scene, no extremely efficient mousy girl held the script, and there would be no Take Two. It was all unexpected and unpredictable and vitally important. It wasn't just Take One.

He had to devise his own lines, and his own actions. Life and reality rushed towards them at a speed of twenty knots. But it was extremely difficult to put two thoughts together, let alone concentrate. At that unheard call the whole static picture came to life. Actors and crowd players swarmed on to the set: the other sailors from their quarters, the cook from his galley, Martin's fellow artists from their dressing-rooms below the poop. They boiled and buzzed; they were all in his situation. After the long, dull, empty pause came this sudden challenge, and the director had gone away to have morning coffee, taking the script with him, leaving them to fend for themselves.

Captain Sorensen was there, of course. He smoked a cigar, he looked thoughtful, and he had joined his officers by the big wheel in the stern. His crescent lips bit down on the cigar, and behind his parchment face his mind was busy and unflurried.

Martin stood with the rest of the featured players. He should have been able to help them, but he couldn't. The author was always a nuisance, and he wasn't even the author now.

"God," he thought, "I've got to make up my mind. What does A do now?"

The ship grew clearer. Her hull had lifted up the sparkling hill. Her bow, making white waves of foam on the still sea, pointed straight at the *Albatros*.

She was going to pass within a biscuit-throw.

Captain Sorensen came down towards his passengers, slippers on feet, long arms dangling, legs bowed. His grin stretched from ear to ear. It was all very goodt, it was fun. His black round eyes goggled.

"So," he said, "we have some very great excitement this morning. Here comes a liner to be most close. She will wish her passengers to see one of the last four-masted barques

that is still in active trade—my *Albatros*. That is something unique for them, and for you this is something unique, too, I tell you. You may not see such a thing again until you reach Port Lincoln, so far away down there in South Australia. Come now, this is interesting to you all and to me, and there isn't no extra charge. Think it over."

He took a turn up the deck, clasping his hands behind his back. They stood there, silent, with no director and no script.

Captain Sorensen returned. He did not attempt a smoke-ring: too many currents agitated the air, but he blew a long, blue-grey puff.

"You, Mr. Bramerton," he said, "you are the wealthiest man aboard here. So you, to me, are the most important." He tilted his cigar, and made his gesture with finger and thumb. "Also I have the respect and liking for you. You are a clever man to be a millionaire. That is goodt. But you aren't now so young as you were a long time since. It will not be always this weather on our passage. Presently there are great gales and bad seas and ice and cold, and the birds my ship is named for fly about her. That you don't like so much. That is badt. To you I give first the offer. What will you pay me to stop that so fine liner and put you aboard her so that you go back to London and sit down in your great offices and are at home again? That would be goodt, yes? Worth something, yes?"

Martin wondered what lines Mr. Bramerton had found for himself. He stood there, silvered with the cement dust of his millions, dry, within himself, and five times married and divorced so that he must be full of other surprises.

"I thank you for the compliment you pay my wealth," said Mr. Bramerton, who had made so many right decisions, "for that's about all I have now, but, truth to tell, I wouldn't pay you a red cent. You can have your four pounds a day, of which at least three is rank profiteering, but who is a millionaire to grumble at that? This ship suits me very well. I've put my signature on the dotted line with you. You can't have me rescued. But should I change my mind, for any reason, you can have my passage money to Port Lincoln, and good luck to you, you sly rascal. And now get on with your Danish auction."

Martin started the applause without realising he had put

his hands together. It was a spontaneous reaction. The old boy had done very well. Apparently you had to have more than a nose for money to make millions. It wasn't a view to which he had ever subscribed before. The others were glad enough of a cue. They, too, clapped the speech, and laughed. The scene took shape.

Captain Sorensen was a good player. If he were taken aback by Mr. Bramerton and the applause he did not show it by the flicker of an eyelash.

"So, so," he said, "it is goodt when a man knows his mind. All this suits me very well. It is goodt. First of all I am a ship-master and I wouldn't want the passengers not to like my *Albatros*. To hear, then, that you are happy to stay aboard is goodt. That you don't want to make more money, that is goodt, too, but I am thinking it shows you are very old, Mr. Bramerton. But that, too, that is only your business. It is no concern of mine. So you stay with us. It is goodt. Do you play chess, Mr. Bramerton?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Bramerton, and couldn't help looking surprised.

"We must have some games," said Captain Sorensen. "I have a set of chessmen which will look very goodt to you. They are jewelled and wonderfully carved, but not loud. Loud, is that right?"

"Okay, captain," said Magda. "You're getting on fine with your English."

"Thank you, my dear Magda," said Captain Sorensen. "To me you are very goodt. Always very goodt. Now you, Mademoiselle Armande, how is it that you feel?"

Mlle Armande gave her silver hair a shake.

"It comes at such short notice," she said. "I've no money to bribe you with, captain, if this is a hold-up. I have made it and spent it. I think, since you are a very queer man, you would let me go for nothing, if I wanted to."

Captain Sorensen chuckled appreciatively.

"You are smart," he said. "Me let you go—for nodings?"

"Yes."

"Maybe you are right. Who can say? But so you don't want to go?"

Again Mlle Armande shook her head.

"No! I have had enough of hurrying about the world in 'planes that drop you in flames in the sea or are forced down by fog or hit a hillside. I have had enough of politics and wars and the mess of civilisation. Alone I should never have had the courage of my needs and made this voyage in your lumbering old barque. But the good God, or something, has put me here in the *Albatros*, and I shall stay at the special cut rate for working journalists you quoted me. Do not disturb yourself, captain. I won't mention it before these wealthy others. It's still high enough. But the sea and the ship are worth the money. Also the rest, and the human comedy. No, captain, I stick to our bargain."

"Then that is goodt," said Captain Sorensen. "Here is another of my famous and great passengers who don't hate the *Albatros*. I am seeing that very soon she will be the most popular ship in the whole wide world, and I must have more cabins built, and I don't have to pay nodings for advertising." He turned on Brown. "You, Miss," he said, "you cannot leave me, not now with all these fine ladies and gentlemens to be waited upon. You are the stewardess; you have signed on."

Brown laughed.

"Why, captain, the last thing I want is to be dumped back in England to look for work."

Captain Sorensen waved his cigar.

"That I know, Miss, that I know," he said, grinning at her in most friendly fashion. "Always you and I have understood each other. I was just pulling your leg, as you say. It is a saying I don't understand, but it is goodt for the slang, and not out of school-books. And now who is next? You, Mr. Trevellion. Once a long time since I promised you that if a ship passed within the biscuit-throw, and I felt inclined, I would put you aboard her. This one does that. Now you are the very rich and clever Englander. What is it worth to you, dear friendt, to get back to your play-writing and play-acting and all the famous great things you do? What is it worth to you to be able to send all the marconigrams you are wishing? What is it worth to have all your luxuries and be back in London in those few days? I have only to send a signal to this fine approaching ship, and she stops for you. Look at her."

They obeyed the command. The hill of the sea had sub-

sided and the liner came slicing towards them, a city, a world.

Martin had been too interested in the impromptu action to prepare and rehearse himself. But as the camera turned on him he found he was ready.

"That's a fair offer, captain," he said. "I'll take it gladly. I don't know what your price is, but I'll make a reasonable bid." There was a chance to put in a line there about thirty pieces of silver, and vent some of his spleen. He cut the line. What Sorensen had done in the war was no concern of his. "I'll pay you a thousand pounds, which is a great deal more than my passage money."

"Oh, Martin!" cried Magda.

"That is goodt money," said Captain Sorensen. "I think I take that."

"But there's one condition—Magda must come with me."

"Darling!" cried Magda, and was suddenly in Martin's arms. She felt fine there.

Captain Sorensen considered the stump of his cigar, enjoying the moment along with everyone else.

"No," he decided, "that wouldn't do. That wouldn't be goodt. Here I am, just starting oop as a famous passenger ship, and the prettiest lady in the world doesn't go on with us? That would be badt. That would be such a poor advertisement that it wouldn't pay—not for a thousand."

"Two," said Martin. With Magda's body against his in the hot morning sunlight it was chicken-feed. There would be no toad back in the sanity and freedom of the real world.

"It wouldn't pay, no."

"Three."

Captain Sorensen stepped aside, flung the stub of his cigar over the rail, and lit another. He did it all very deliberately and with great content.

"It is nice to be rich," he said, then: "Very nice. I am not needing your money, no, not if you made it ten thousand. The company of our so beautiful Magda here is worth more to me."

"Oh, captain," cried Magda, "you must think a lot of me. You are a lamb!"

"I do think a lot of you, Magda, but I am not a lamb," said Captain Sorensen. He gave her a widened grin. "Besides," he went on to the others, "our so beautiful Magda is

important to my idea of the passenger sailing-ship—she must be there for the photographic men when at last we reach Port Lincoln. She is the glamour girl for them. See, I know many fine slang words. Yes, that is what I say. So it is decided: it is finished. All my passengers stay with me. That is what I like, dear friendts. Now all is goodt, and presently there comes a wind, and on we go. So I am happy everything is worked out so goodt, and I don't lose one single customer. Yes."

The liner, glittering, sparkling, decks rising in tiers, powerful, majestic, was very close now. She dwarfed the *Albatros* which had been the centre of the universe. A long spurt of silver steam leapt up into the blue from her forward funnel, and the silence which had endured so long was splintered by a harsh blare of sound, loud and fierce and arrogant.

Magda was startled out of Martin's arms, the group broke up and rushed to the rail. Even Captain Sorensen and his crazy auction where there had been so little for sale when at last there was a bidder, was forgotten. They were children, thrilled by the most magnificent toy. They laughed and waved and pointed. There seemed to be thousands of people over there, come out of the great emptiness, passing by. Those others were excited, too. Out of their pomp and circumstance they gazed at the *Albatros* with wondering eyes, seeing in her the real sea, rather frightening but still romantic. They longed to be aboard her, and off their broad, arterial road; they wouldn't have changed places for anything.

A flutter of flags from the *Albatros* was answered by a flutter which leapt up from the towering bridge. The two ships talked together in the gaily coloured esperanto of the sea.

"It is nodings," said Captain Sorensen, who had slip-slopped down to rejoin his passengers. "We report ourselves as outward bound to Port Lincoln. She is that very fine vessel the *Andean Star*. But the lucky people who travel in a four-masted barque, they don't want her, no. That is very goodt."

He rubbed parchment hands, congratulating himself and them all.

Martin ached to be over there. Presently he would be having a Sunday morning drink with the commander up in his day-room behind the bridge. The captain would be a

large, smooth, placid man, like a bishop. His cabin would be comfortable and very normal, but decently austere. A picture of his wife, plump and not very smart, would look down from above the mahogany desk. Everything would be sane and right and familiar. There would be at the very least twenty worthwhile acquaintances aboard, and life would click back.

They stood, forgetting all about the *Albatros*, looking out.

A strange sound, a strangled cry, called them back to their own sphere. Martin swung about. He swore a wordless oath of horror and dismay. An extraordinary figure was scrambling up the ladder to the poop, a zombie, Lazarus come forth. Above pyjama trousers and bare feet it was only a bundle of funeral cerements, a white mummy. It staggered clumsily across to Captain Sorensen, storming, raging, and reaching him dropped on its knees, holding out appealing hands on wild, thick arms which might have been modelled by Epstein.

In the bright sunlight it looked obscene and terrible.

"Oh, dear," Martin heard Mr. Bramerton say, "that must be poor Himmelmann. I'm afraid we'd all forgotten him."

"Martin!—darling!—it gives me the creeps," said Magda. She clung to him, her body pressed against his, warmingly, richly.

Himmelmann poured out a torrent of appeals in what must have been German, but Martin didn't understand a word. And with the appeals blended what sounded like threats and orders that were almost screamed. Captain Sorensen stood smoking his cigar.

Mr. Bramerton stepped forward, dry and woody as a praying mantis.

"We should put this man on the other ship, captain," he said. "I will pay his ransom, if that is what you want."

Captain Sorensen hunched his shoulders.

"Who can think of everything?" he asked. "Him, I am forgetting, as you all had, too. I reproach myself. But see, now it is too late."

His cigar invited them to look for themselves.

Yes, it was too late. The *Andean Star* went on, showing them a round stern, leaving a long and shining wake ploughed across the flat plain of the sea. The brief little spasm of interest aroused by the chance meeting with the funny old

sailing-ship had passed. She climbed the other bulge of the globe, and very soon only her masts and the tips of her funnels would show. All that would remain of the *Albatros* would be a memory in a few minds, and slightly tilted and quite unimpressive pictures in the dark boxes of Kodaks waiting to be developed by chemists in city streets.

No calling back the *Andean Star*. She went on her way as inexorably as Time.

Poor Dr. Himmelmann had collapsed in a limp mass on the deck. He was just a mound at Captain Sorensen's feet. The captain wagged his head.

"Yes, I reproach myself. But who remembers a sick man who isn't in our lives? There is this comfort for me: no doctor could have helped him, and he is, I am afraid, a little out of his mind. To stay here in our ship, that is his best chance. All that can be done shall be done for him." He signed to the two officers, and they picked up the strange figure and carried him carefully off the poop, Captain Sorensen following, concerned and vigilant lest he should come to any small harm.

"Upon my soul," said Mr. Bramerton, "I prefer the *Albatros* without intruders."

He passed his hand across his dry brow.

"There was a strange thing," said Mlle Armande. "That was very strange."

"Most upsetting," Martin agreed.

"You none of you speak German?"

"I speak a little, mademoiselle," said Brown. "I worked in Germany for a while. I can generally understand the herr doktor, but he was jabbering so just now and I was so excited and churned up that I'm afraid I didn't follow."

"It's of no consequence," said Mlle Armande. "As the captain said he is probably a little out of his mind. And yet it was strange. But—no matter."

"I feel guilty about him," said Mr. Bramerton. "I don't often overlook details even where only the human factor is concerned. Or is that merely when they're my employees?"

He moved away, making tut-tut noises.

Magda turned to Martin and took his hands. Her hands felt like rosebuds.

"Oh, angel," she said, "that was swell of you to stay

in this old boat because the horrid creature wouldn't let me go with you. That's love, Martin."

"Yes," he said absently, "yes, Magda."

The *Andean Star* was a smudge on the northern horizon. Martin wondered why he wasn't having that drink with her commander.

So that was how a scene was shot when the director had gone to have a cup of coffee and taken script and script-girl with him. The cameras had stopped turning, and there could be no retake.

The quiet of the holy-day, the quiet of the calm, settled down again.

VI

Captain Sorensen considered Magda with the admiration and close attention of a connoisseur. She was a pretty thing, as pretty as his dancing girl or his chirping bird or any of his other loot. But could anything of flesh and blood, so beautiful, be just a toy? He thought so. He was prepared to wager on it.

"You're right, captain, dear," said Magda, sipping the cocktail he had prepared with loving care, "this is just what the doctor ordered."

"It is," he admitted. "I am a goodt doctor of drinks."

Magda sipped it, however, without turning a single sweeping eyelash, as if it were milk.

"You're rather sweet, you know, darling," she said casually.

"It is goodt the way you talk to me, Magda, darling. Always you say to me the things I am not. It gives me a badt feeling that is goodt. I am not sweet. I am a nasty fellow, I have evil thoughts."

"You wouldn't be a man if you hadn't," said Magda. "And I wouldn't give fourpence for you if you weren't a man."

"I gave three thousand pounds for you to-day, Magda."

"I know. You don't think even little me could forget a compliment like that? It was wizard, even though it didn't do me any good. Or perhaps it may have at that."

"It was how I truly felt. To a rich man like me you are worth all that money."

"Or more, captain. You'd be surprised."

"Only once for many years have I been surprised."

"Last night?"

"Last night was no surprise," said Captain Sorensen, grin spreading. "I am thinking of a few days back, and you are not even in it." He could have gone on and hinted and set her puzzling, but that would have been a waste of time. It wasn't as if she were Mlle Armande or someone like that. The instant he said she wasn't in it, her interest died. "Last night had to happen. It did not worry me, no, not at all. The Englander, he is a ladies' man and he is at sea and bored. But me, I am not bored and always I am at sea. I am not a ladies' man. I am a man only for one lady. This is my world, and a very goodt world I find it, don't you? There is a difference between the Mr. Trevellion and me, don't you think?"

"Not so very much," said Magda. "He was prepared to pay three thou' for me, too."

Captain Sorensen laughed with enjoyment.

"You are a very smart girl, Magda."

"I'm not, you know. And you know I'm not, what's more. But when it comes to men I've been about a bit."

"It is a pity you don't speak Danish, Magda. It is very hardt for me to be clever in the English, and with you I do want to be clever."

"You don't, you know," smiled Magda. "And you're as clever as a bagful of monkeys, anyway."

"A bagful of monkeys?" said Captain Sorensen, grey brow creasing. "That is a goodt bit of slang. But would they be so clever?"

"Skip it," said Magda.

"You needt more to drink," the captain decided. "And please to help yourself again to a cigarette. They are goodt, yes? Egyptian."

"Swell," said Magda.

"Please to touch the tail of the rhinoceros and his horn comes alight. He is goodt, yes?"

He grinned at another golden toy.

"You certainly have tricky things," said Magda.

"Oh, me, I am full of tricks," said Captain Sorensen. "All the tricks there are I am full of—like the bagful of monkeys."

"And how," said Magda cheerfully. "Here's to the rhino and the skin off your nose."

She raised her glass, forgetting about the naked girl who was the handle, now that she was so much more at home.

"That is goodt," he said. "'The skin off your nose.'—I don't understand it, but it isn't from the school-books. So? You don't mean sunburn?"

Magda shook her red-gold curls.

"It's just a saying."

"It is very funny, and goodt. I am thinking, Magda, that now I have paid three thousand pounds to keep you here in the *Albatros* it would be absurd to charge you fare, too. When we are coming to Australia, then you will be worth your food and cabin. And in between whiles why not let us just have a lot of goodt times and be goodt friendts?"

"Why, of course, captain, dear," said Magda, glowing. "I love to have good times, and I can't imagine us being anything but friends."

"Then that is goodt. That is very goodt. Now you must see, please, the rest of my quarters, as we say at sea."

Magda considered a moment, sipping the cocktail as if it were milk, puffing her expensive cigarette.

"You mean the bedroom, captain?"

Captain Sorensen held up talon hands in protest.

"At sea we call him the captain's night-room."

"And what's the difference, darling?"

"The difference," explained Captain Sorensen helpfully, "is that we are at sea, and I am the captain."

"Oh," said Magda, and left it at that.

"Coom," said Captain Sorensen. "Look. You will be delighted. He is goodt. Yes, he is very goodt."

He rose and beckoned, and Magda, glass in hand, smiled and accepted the invitation. Bedrooms, of course, would always interest her. And he had something to show her. The only pity was that though she would be delighted she would not have the brains to realise that there had never before been such a room at sea since ships began, perhaps not even in the yachts of multi-millionaires. They would feel that a cabin had still to bear some resemblance to a cabin. He had had the wisdom to take quite the opposite view.

He stood aside and bowed her in.

"Oooo!" said Magda.

He wasn't sure of the period—the elegant young man had seen to all that—but he knew the tiny, perfect place would have served as a jewel-box to hold the Pompadour or Marie Antoinette. The walls were covered with a padded material stitching with tiny fleurs-de-lis of gold, the carpet was white stitching with tiny fleur-de-lis of gold, the carpet was white and deep as virgin snow in January, the bed was a four-poster with a canopy of gold. Cupids frisked about it, aiming down their arrows, round and chubby. The porthole had been squared and framed in gilt, making the sunny world outside a picture hung there to delight the eye. In place of practical wardrobes to hold a seafarer's belongings there were lacquered cabinets inlaid with roses and leaves, with white wigged gallants and gracious ladies in oval panels. The day-room was startling enough, but the night-room was stunning.

Captain Sorensen stood there, in his trodden-over slippers, smoking his cigar, and grinned. Well, she was certainly amazed, but it was, in a way, a pity that she could not really understand that she saw something unique. But she wasn't one like that. You couldn't expect her to be, with her body and face. The Frenchwoman, now, would have been much more deeply and genuinely aware.

"He is goodt?"

"You could knock me down with a feather," said Magda.

"Yes, he is a goodt little place." Captain Sorensen tilted his cigar, rubbed his hands. "Here it is very comfortable. The other you have said is a love-nest, but now I am showing to you the genuine article, isn't that what you say?"

"It certainly is," said Magda dreamily, gazing about, South Atlantic eyes awed and enormous.

"For you it might have been made. For you perhaps it was, though then I am not knowing."

Magda put down her glass, put her hands to his leathery cheeks, and kissed him lightly on the crescent of his mouth. It wasn't a real kiss, but only an enthusiastic social gesture. Captain Sorensen realised that.

"There," she said, "that's for saying such nice things, and having such a perfect bedroom in this funny old boat."

"She is a barque," the captain had to point out, though it really didn't matter. It wouldn't have mattered if Magda had called the *Albatros* a trawler.

"You can't expect a girl to remember that just at the

moment. Oh, my sweet, I've never seen anything so wizard before."

"Then that is goodt," said Captain Sorensen. "Here we can be very goodt friends."

Magda immediately recovered a little from her rapture.

"I think I'd rather do that outside," she said. "This place is a bit compromising." She emptied her glass. "Let's go and get us another drink."

"There is plenty of time," he assured her. "Plenty. There are many pretty, pleasant things I have here. Let me show you some. Wait a moment—I try to think. What is there here you would like to see? Perhaps to have?" He knew very well, of course, and the pretty pleasant things were all to hand, but it was better done this way. "Let me now to look." He opened a drawer at random, closed it, opened another, and a third. "Why, this is goodt!" he exclaimed. "Here is the very kind of articles you would find very goodt. It is goodt chance we strike on them among so much."

He turned about, delighted, and held out two pairs of stockings and two sets of under-things. Even Smith's could not have provided anything more suitable for their star mannequin; even Magda could not have desired anything more exquisite.

"Oooo!" she cried again, and this time there was a hungry note in her admiration.

"They are goodt?"

"They're super!"

"So?—they are 'super'? Yes, I understand that. These, too, I must have bought for you, my dear Magda, though I didn't know that either. It is only that I like pretty things, and that is why I like you."

"You're the sweetest man, captain," said Magda, "no matter what you say. I like pretty things, too. I certainly like those. Are they really for me?"

"Really they are. I have all kinds of surprises and thrills, yes?"

"You certainly have, darling." Magda was a bird of paradise who, instead of squawking like a crow, could coo as soft and sweet as any dove.

"I am not liking to think of one so beautiful as my Magda having only the clothes she stands up in. That is not goodt to me. See, I give them to you, here, like this." He looked

very sly and wicked as he did so with a bow. "See, I don't even ask you just to see now if they fit you, though I would like to."

"Oh, captain, you're priceless!"

Magda was very amused at his fun; they were such good friends that he could say almost anything he wanted to. She patted his cheek. "And so are these lovely presents. You're quite right to start running a passenger boat. You know how to make the ladies happy."

"Such things are only for my most beautiful passenger," Captain Sorensen pointed out.

"I should hope so," said Magda warmly. "They'd be wasted on anybody else."

"But when they are on your body, then they're not wasted. Then they look so goodt as they are. Perhaps one day I am permitted to judge?"

Magda was stroking the silk with petal-finger-tips.

"Seeing they'd cost a fortune back in London, and all the money in the world couldn't buy them here I do believe you're entitled to. I'll think about it. I play fairly fair."

"Fairly fair? How fair is that?"

"Fair enough," said Magda, "and as fair as you've any right to expect."

"I see," said Captain Sorensen, considering. "In here in this so goodt room, that would be the place."

"Oh, captain, captain, you didn't think I meant to stage an undies parade up on the deck? I'm ever so grateful, and you're a duck. I was getting so tired of the only things I've got, and having to wash them out every night, and hope they'd be dry by morning. They're nice, of course, but they're not so nice as these."

"How nice are they?" Captain Sorensen invited.

Magda played fairly fair. Draping her presents adroitly over one arm she swept up her linen costume and gave him a glimpse of perfect legs and Smith's most alluring panties. Captain Sorensen was delighted, frustrated and amused. This Magda, she was no fool though she seemed to be. Nothing could have been judged or timed more accurately. It was a lovely instant—his night-room might have been designed for it—and it meant nothing at all. He wasn't a fool either.

"Do you know," she asked, even as she gave him his

little treat, "what the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governor of South Carolina?"

"Please?" said Captain Sorensen, still happily dazzled but interested in this new lesson in slang.

"Why," she said, "it's a hell of a long time between drinks."

"Coom! I would like to see more of you in here. See, that is a goodt joke. But I am so fond of you I don't ask more than to be with you. Coom, we have that drink. My Magda must not be thirsty."

"You're a honey," said Magda, warming him through with the light of her South Atlantic eyes. "If I don't look out you'll have me just where you want me."

"That I hope," said Captain Sorensen honestly. "But you are so lovely that I am as patient as the busy bee. See, I know your sayings."

"You know 'em all," said Magda.

She put her arm lightly about him and they went back to the day-room, laughing together. It was all very goodt.

Captain Sorensen had a head which alcohol did not bother at all. So it seemed had Magda, who looked as if she drank the dew from violets. She took her third with the same easy nonchalance. That was extraordinary and not so goodt. The cocktails were as the English slang term went: dynamite—which meant they should blow you up. It didn't make things easier.

Magda, back in her chair, dazzled him with a richer smile.

"I'm having a wizard morning," she said, and again her finger-tips stroked the silks. "Just imagine, none of this would have happened if we had gone away in that steamer. It mightn't have been nearly so much fun."

"Oh, here in the *Albatros,* we have plenty of fun," Captain Sorensen promised.

"You bet," said Magda, speaking more generally and not promising so much. "There's one thing I've been intending to tell you, captain, sweet, but you've been so nice that I haven't had a moment. I've some good news for you, too, in return for these pretties you've given me."

"Goodt news from you?—that is goodt news, indeed."

Captain Sorensen sat forward, and his dark eyes popped in anticipation.

"I mean after you being so nice, it's nice to think I've been able to make quite a lot of money for you."

Captain Sorensen sat back. It wasn't so goodt. He found a cigar and lit it at the rhinoceros horn. He needed the pause.

"Money?" he said then. "From you to me? It isn't money I want from you."

Magda laughed gaily.

"I know it isn't, you old darling. But money's still money, and handy to be going on with."

"Oh, money, yes—he is goodt." Thumb caressed finger. "But I am not understanding?"

"It's quite simple," said Magda, looking equally simple. "Since last night—or I mean really this morning when you wouldn't let him take me away—Mr. Trevellion feels in a sort of a way responsible for me. He's going to pay you my fare. Isn't that perfect?"

Captain Sorensen looked shocked, horrified.

"That he cannot do," he said.

"But he insists."

"Always here in my ship," Captain Sorensen complained angrily, "there are people who try to 'insist.' Aboard the *Albatros* only I can do that. No, it isn't goodt, not goodt. If he did such a thing, then it is making you his kept woman, his whore."

Magda blushed like a dawn sky, and astonishment and reproach were written on her face and deepened the blue of her eyes.

"Oh, captain," she gasped, "I didn't think you were a man like that. Swearing at me. Calling me beastly names. I should slap your face."

She didn't. In her indignation and upset she finished her drink without noticing that she did so.

Captain Sorensen saw he had made a blunder from several angles. Amongst others there was the point that the Englander's money was as good as anybody else's—better, in fact, since one might take it and also that which it had been spent to buy. He put his cigar down, he set his drink aside, and he rose and bent in contrition and apology.

"Magda, my so dear Magda," he said, "please to forgive one who is speaking only out of the love for you. These ugly words I say—please to forget them as if they were never said. Please, this I ask."

"No sooner asked than granted," said Magda. "I don't doubt you meant well, only I'm a very touchy girl, and I don't like gentlemen to speak nastily to me."

"That I would never do," said Captain Sorensen. "Never! Never! Only very nice things am I saying to my Magda. See, let us forget about the passage-money. That is all very—all very—sordid, don't you say?—between goodt friends like us. We don't mention it again. All shall be as you wish. Any business there is to talk I talk with that Trevellion."

"You're an angel," said Magda. "I do hate having to even mention money matters."

"Never should you have to," said Captain Sorensen, "but if you could see through my skull, then, I don't think you would be calling me an angel with what I am thinking inside it, here with you."

"You say the naughtiest things, captain," said Magda, accepting a cigarette which he had lit for her at the rhinoceros, "but you do it so nicely that even a good little girl like me can't be cross."

"I think perhaps you are not so very goodt," mused Captain Sorensen. "But you are more beautiful to look at than my *Albatros*, and that is a lot. I think I am saying more than you know." A knock at the door interrupted him. "See, it is our meal. A pity, because here I could sit with you for ever, as the talk goes. But we must eat, too, yes?"

"I'm ravenous," Magda confessed.

"You don't play chess, Magda?"

"Good lord, no," said Magda. "Why ever should I?"

"You? No!" said Captain Sorensen. "I was just thinking. I am very fond of a game of chess. But with you to play chess that would be the waste of time."

"I'll say it would," said Magda, "because I wouldn't know even the first move."

"Me, I know all the moves, but still I think there are better games for us to play."

"There must be lots of better games for everyone," said Magda, "or I would have had to learn chess. I know all about etchings."

"Etchings?"

"It's only a gag," smiled Magda. "It's just the silly way

I talk. Now before we eat, let me go and put my lovely lovelies away. You've no idea how darling you've been."

"So I am darling? That is goodt. And you are darling to me, too, and it goes goodt. Ahead there is a long passage to that Port Lincoln."

"I don't care how long," said Magda. She moved across to him in one impulsive swoop and kissed his brow. There was no lipstick on her mouth to leave a smear. "You're wizard."

"You are like the warm and rich sun by which we all live," said Captain Sorensen, and gallantly bowed her out.

It had been a goodt morning, all things considered. One had to enjoy playing with lovely toys. One was not a child to grab and smash and forget.

VII

Magda staged her parade of the new lingerie, as being worn at sea in the Doldrums, that same afternoon, but it didn't take place on deck or in the night-room, and Captain Sorensen wasn't present. She posed for Brown and Mlle Armande in their cabin.

"They're heavenly," said Brown, "and so right for you. You are lucky."

"Oh, no, Kathie," said Mlle Armande. "You know better than that. It isn't a question of luck—or if it is it's only a question of being Magda. And, Magda, for shame! —you asked me how to behave at the captain's cocktail-party!"

Magda laughed and shook her curls.

"I needn't have worried. Even a man like the captain is easy to handle, and he's a perfect lamb."

"I told you, didn't I?" said Mlle Armande. "He's about the most exciting man I know. What other would have been able to produce such things out here in the middle of the ocean?"

"That's true, too," said Magda. "Thanks a lot for the tip, mamsel. He wants to see heaps more of me."

"I don't wonder," said Mlle Armande. "He has very nice judgment. And what about Martin? How is he going to like you taking undies and stockings from Captain Sorensen?"

Magda considered.

"I don't think I need tell him, and I know you two won't. It's a girl's own business where she shops for her clothes. If a gentleman cares to give me things in a nice way I don't see it's anybody else's affair."

"It's entirely your affaire," Mlle Armande agreed promptly.

"And, anyway, why should Martin ever know what I wear underneath in the daytime?"

"Precisely," smiled Mlle Armande, giving Brown a glance of quiet enjoyment. "How right you are as usual, Magda! How perfectly right! A girl is entitled to and usually can wear anything she feels inclined to—in the daytime."

"Meeouw," said Brown, small and prim, but she laughed with Mlle Armande and Magda laughed with them, for she felt very happy modelling again before a feminine audience who knew what really pretty things meant and didn't have them. She would have been even happier if they had been in Smith's and the two good kids could have gone and bought the same. She never had any need to be jealous of other girls, even though they bought the clothes she displayed. Their purchases would never look as good again as they did on her.

CHAPTER FOUR

I

MR. BRAMERTON, beaten once more, shook his snowy head.

"You know something about chess, captain," he conceded.

"I play goodt, yes?" said Captain Sorensen, rasping his hands together, making no attempt to conceal his satisfaction.

"Too well for me."

Sorensen offered another cigar.

"See, I give you what you call the consolation prize. They're goodt, yes?"

"Excellent," said Mr. Bramerton. "You know quite a bit about how to live, too."

His eyes twinkled at the day-room.

The approval of a millionaire delighted Captain Sorensen.

"Oh, yes, I live goodt. For me there is only the best."

"You have lots of pretty things." Mr. Bramerton nodded at the chess pieces, which were gems of carving with ruby chips for eyes.

"Always I like the pretty things. Always it is my hobby, ever since I can afford to collect."

Mr. Bramerton considered Captain Sorensen with shrewd old eyes which had seen many men. Trevellion was right: he was extraordinarily like a toad: the slash of mouth, the bright and beady eyes, the face receding to a brow that bulged up again. He had a toad's amiable and sardonic look: he was probably as harmless as a toad, but he created the same strange revulsion. Perhaps, Mr. Bramerton decided, one's feelings dated back to centuries ago when the young mind was fed on fairy-stories. The poor toad was always horrible. Yet there was something likeable about the man. Perhaps because a riddle? A toad, from childhood on, was a creature that interested and puzzled you.

"Yes," said Mr. Bramerton, "I can quite see you are a collector of pretty things. Yes. Whether old ivory, or flesh and blood."

Captain Sorensen gave his ancient passenger a wink.

"You see me well," he admitted. "Flesh and blood can be well worth collecting, and nicer to the touch." His bony, toad fingers caressed the empty air.

"It's an expensive hobby."

"Oh, yes, but I am, in my little way, like you. I can afford my pleasures. You, too, you in your time—you have been something of a collector."

"Quite a collector."

"That is why we understand each other so well, my friendt. You in your day have taken a lot out of life. Now you don't care any more. But me I am a much younger than you. I am in my prime, don't you say? That is goodt. It is why I enjoy this passage. And you?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Bramerton, "I'm enjoying it immensely in my dull old way."

Captain Sorensen's left eyelid flicked again in a wink for the other rich man who knew what was what.

"I think you enjoy goodt the game that goes on," he said. "I think you see more than you say. But let us now have another game of this other chess with my other pretty things, though I tell you first of all I shall win again."

"I'm sure you will," said Mr. Bramerton, helping to set out the chessmen, "and I shall still be happy."

He spoke to himself rather than his opponent. The more money you had the harder it seemed to buy happiness, but aboard this antique sailing-ship he had found a great content. He felt absurdly young and alive. Travelling in liners had been just a matter of getting from place to place and in urgent touch with the outside world all the time. There was always a bell-boy or a steward or someone bringing you a message with a servility which conveyed that you were a very important person to be pursued through the ether. Nothing of that now. He had escaped into a boy's adventure story; he lived in Melville, Stevenson and Conrad. No one could reach out and drag him back to his millions and all the years he had spent in making them.

The *Albatros* swept along, leapt along. They were done with the stifling but soothing tropic calms, with the lassitude of the Equator. The *Albatros* had spread wide, white wings, and rode the wind. They were down in the South Atlantic now. The ship rose and fell, heeled over and swung back, was vibrant with life. Mr. Bramerton was reminded of days

when he had played truant from school and gone sailing on the green waters of Port Phillip in Peter Payne's dinghy. That was decades ago. Much as he had travelled he hadn't felt a living craft beneath him since: he hadn't been so young. He was grateful to Captain Sorensen. When one had everything money could buy it was good to find something you would never have thought of buying.

He hadn't been concentrating on the game, for his own thoughts were better, and he knew that even if he had done so the outcome would have been the same.

"So, it is goodt."

Mr. Bramerton rediscovered the board. It was good, all right. Nothing to be done about it.

"Come, let us drink a glass of Snaps," said Captain Sorensen. "I am thinking that I am a poor man compared with you, dear Mr. Bramerton, and it would be a goodt idea that we play for some little prize of money, eh? Or perhaps that you don't wish?"

"Willingly," said Mr. Bramerton. "Even if I lose every time, you've earned it."

"That is goodt. Shall we say ten English pounds a game?"

"With pleasure," said Mr. Bramerton. He had spent a lot of money on women and wine and song; in art shops and all the places which flourish on the really rich; in Harley Street and in clinics—but of late none of them had done him as much good as Captain Sorensen and his four-masted barque. He smiled to find himself wishing that Ruby was aboard, Ruby as she used to be under the gold of the wattles by the river that was ever-flowing.

Captain Sorensen put the gold tray on the table, and poured the drinks from a decanter of Venetian glass. More pretty things—and now exhibited to a millionaire.

"It is goodt," he said comfortably.

But at the next moment it wasn't. The door was wrenched open, the curtain thrust aside, and Himmelmann entered in a kind of stumbling charge, with Jorgen behind him, fumbling and distressed, like the inept keeper of an animal whose charge has escaped. His pink and boyish face wore a look of dismayed alarm.

"Look out, sir," he warned in Danish. "He is very angry. I think he comes to hurt you."

"He will not," said Captain Sorensen, looking grim. "Leave him to me, Jorgen."

"Yes, sir," said Jorgen unhappily. He let the curtain fall and closed the door.

Finding the captain was not alone, and daunted perhaps by the serenity of the luxurious cabin, Himmelmann checked his rush, and stood flung forward, swaying slightly on his bare feet, growling within the fortress of his bandages, hands thrusting on the air for support.

"Perhaps I'd better go," Mr. Bramerton suggested.

"Stay and finish your drink, my friendt. Forgive, please, this intrusion. I must speak briefly with this sick man, though he is so rude. In German I must speak since he has no other language."

Mr. Bramerton subsided. He could not help feeling a morbid interest in the poor devil who had such an inhuman figure—a robot inhabited by a soul and mind.

"And now?" Captain Sorensen turned on Himmelmann.

"Send him away," Himmelmann commanded. "I must speak with you."

"He stays. He is my invited guest. You are not. He speaks no German. What have you to say?"

"A lot," snarled Himmelmann, blackened lips twisting. "What game is this you are playing? First you do not put me aboard the liner, and now there is a wind but we haven't got to South America."

Captain Sorensen shrugged.

"We are not going to South America," he said. "We go to Australia."

The wild eyes blazed in their slit.

"You are not obeying my orders!" Himmelmann shouted.

"In these days, who is?" asked Captain Sorensen very quietly.

"You are, if you are wise."

"It is you who are not wise, dear doctor. You don't look at the situation in the right way. You are only my passenger, Rudolf Himmelmann. Why should I obey you? I give orders here aboard the *Albatros*."

"You know very well who I am. I have honoured you with my confidence."

"I know you are Doctor Himmelmann of Argentina. You have impressed that on me. I accept it. If through some

silly delusion I believed you to be any other I should be looking for heiling millions, for the Gestapo and the S.S. bodyguard—for many, many things and people I don't see here with you in my cabin. Then I should be afraid and docile and do your will. But now I see only one very much alone and badly burned and hurt—a man who would not be alive were it not for me, a man whose life belongs to me because I salvaged it as flotsam from the sea. These are the things you must consider, dear doctor."

Himmelmann made furious animal noises in his throat. Captain Sorensen puffed smoke-rings.

"Please to continue to excuse us, Mr. Bramerton," he said aside. "This one, he is difficult, but he is sick, so I don't want to be so cross with him as I should be."

"Carry on, carry on," said Mr. Bramerton.

"You are a villain and a fool," stormed Himmelmann. "You are a devil. You delight in torturing me. You are a slave who has turned on his master."

"Like most of us," Captain Sorensen admitted candidly, "I am many things."

The white hand which thrust out from the bandages clenched into a fist and beat the air, shattering a perfect smoke-ring.

"I tell you you are mad. Even in your own interests you are mad."

"No, that I am not," said Captain Sorensen with certainty.

"But if you take me to South America I can and will reward you. I have great wealth there, and powerful friends."

"These things are what you say to me dear doctor, when you want me to do your will. But how do I know the Doctor Himmelmann has great wealth and friends? He was a science teacher at Heidelburg, and he hasn't even had that very poorly paid job for years. Perhaps when he got ashore he wouldn't be able to recompense me for all my time and trouble. How do I know I can trust the word of this Himmelmann? What kind of a record has he for honesty and keeping promises? I don't know. At sea I am the master, but once this Himmelmann gets his foot ashore, what then? Mightn't he snap his fingers in my face and walk away without so much as a thank you?"

The fist unclenched and the two hands met suddenly in supplication.

"But, captain, I swear to you——?"

"And what is the oath of Doctor Himmelmann worth? Just how binding is it?"

The hands beat up and down, as if to break a cruel but invisible barrier.

"In Australia I am no value to you at all. There, indeed, I shall be only Doctor Himmelmann, a German refugee, powerless, penniless."

"That is true," Captain Sorensen confessed, granting a fair point. "But on the other hand, in Australia, supposing you were only pretending to be Himmelmann—then an interesting and amusing situation presents itself."

Himmelmann fell back an unsteady step.

"You would betray me?" he demanded in a choked growl.

Sorensen held out open hands in a gesture of frankness. He grinned.

"I am a very ordinary man," he said, "and like any other would do anything that suited him."

"You have no proof. No one would believe you."

"Who knows? Even ashore a ship-master is a person of some standing."

The pale, fierce eyes turned thoughtful and cunning, and Himmelmann considered what his next move should be.

Captain Sorensen took the opportunity to remark to his guest, "I have this one checkmated. Soon I am at your service again."

"Quite," said Mr. Bramerton, "quite!" He would have given something to have understood German. Though the captain preserved his cool, reptilian poise, this, Mr. Bramerton knew, was a very strange interview. It was an extraordinary experience to sit there, sensing so much and knowing nothing. What, oh, what, was the meaning of these guttural sentences they flung to and fro?

"So it is war?" said Himmelmann. "You would find me better as a friend than an enemy."

"That can be said of all," Captain Sorensen pointed out. "But if one must make an enemy it is well he should be weak and maimed."

"I am a desperate and fearless man who will stop at nothing, Sorensen."

"It is possible."

"I will tell you something now to warn you. That 'plane was not struck by lightning."

"Indeed?" said Captain Sorensen, not at all surprised.

"I fired it myself!" Himmelmann said, flinging up his right arm dramatically.

"If I believed you," said Captain Sorensen, "I should say you deserve even more punishment that you have received."

"You must believe me, for it is true. Another German who spoke good English told me we had been ordered to return to England with no reason given, inexplicably. But I saw what the explanation might be—the British Secret Service had found out something very important about one of the passengers. He must not be allowed to reach the safety of Argentina. I was the passenger. I have the courage and nerve of a god. I saw your ship there so close, and I knew just what I had to do. Once again I risked all to gain all. I risked a terrible death on an instant's decision."

"If all this should be true you have killed a great many innocent people, and it is only common justice that you should not profit by your intuition. If all this should be true I should make myself the accomplice of a murderer if I did your will."

"I have told you this as a warning, Sorensen. I will stop at nothing. At nothing, you hear?"

Again he shook his clenched fist.

"You are speaking quite loudly enough to be heard," said Captain Sorensen. "But that does not make good sense of your words. I do not believe what you say, but let that pass. I make all allowances. I think your terrible experience and your injuries have made you mad. You are not right in your head. You have delusions. That, dear doctor, is the truth of the matter."

Himmelmann stepped forward and shook his fist, at the end of its thick white bludgeon of arm, in Captain Sorensen's face which continued to grin insolently.

"The truth of the matter you have yet to learn," he cried, his voice mounting to a shrill note. "It will be a bitter and terrible lesson, you may rely on that. I leave you now, but

all you have said is remembered, and you will pay for everything."

"So long as you go I do not mind the rest," said Captain Sorensen, most unperturbed. "Allow me to open the door."

He stepped across, and did so, holding the curtain back with mocking politeness. Himmelmann, with a strange sound in his throat, which was part oath and part a strangled sob, lurched out, his great white head bowed down.

Captain Sorensen brushed sandpaper hands together, closed the door, and returned to his chair. He picked up his glass with the air of one who has earned refreshment.

"Whatever was it all about?" Mr. Bramerton knew his question wouldn't be answered as he wanted it to be, but he had to ask it, nevertheless.

"It is nodings, nodings," soothed Captain Sorensen. "That one, his head isn't right. He is what you say: barmy. See, I know the slang. For his own goodt he must be kept in detention in his cabin. He must not be the worry to me and to my passengers. That is not goodt. No. I give the orders, but first another drink. You have been most patient, most goodt."

Very firmly he closed the matter. Mr. Bramerton sighed. He was so curious, but it was no use.

II

No fault of Magda's. To let even the suspicion of such a thought cross the mind was rank injustice. She had stimulated him, brought him back to warm life when he had been in danger of turning into a mollusc. He was fertile with a score of germs and ideas. That none of them came to anything was entirely due to this wretched environment. How could a man who had lived and worked in the most pleasant and civilised conditions be expected to produce when his whole world had shrunk into the size of a stage with a few over-populated dressing-rooms below it?

Quite natural that Magda should want to be with him, and he wanted her to want to be. The sea was boring to both of them. Also, if she wasn't in his company the chances were she would be with Sorensen. That was the devil. No lover could be expected to concentrate with that thought nagging him. The other men had been bad enough with dim and lost

Mercia, but then the other men hadn't been Sorensens, and Mercia was Mercia. No better than Magda—no woman could be that—only different, utterly different.

If only the toad had let Magda and him escape in that haunting liner he would be working now as he never had before, and that was saying a good deal. With Magda at some little place up the river, or in Cornwall, or even in France—with Magda to dazzle the men and dim all the lovelies—then he would have shown them something.

Instead he was an ancient mariner chained to this accursed albatross.

A good thing Magda had gone below to sleep for an hour. She hated to see him in low spirits, and would have done her best to cheer him up. Poor sweet!—she wasn't very good at that. In broad daylight, watched by a hundred eyes, she was so handicapped, though God knew! it was a treat and privilege just to be allowed to sit and look at her. He did a lot of that, and never, never tired of it.

Still, as he was a bit down it really was as well to be alone.

He paced to and fro across the poop.

The sea, which for days had been the exact colour of Magda's eyes—they'd all remarked on it—was shot through now by a new tint of slaty grey. They were driving along out of the healthy Trades into colder, harsher latitudes. The flying-fish and the dolphins journeyed with them no more. They had stayed behind in their own lazy waters. That morning the ship had passed a whale, wallowing, raising blunt head, spouting a feathery fountain of silver spray.

"There she blows!" old Mr. Bramerton had shouted, like a delighted boy.

But Martin had felt chilled, remembering Sorensen's words about the weather that was good for the famous and great writing man of England, and the other kind of weather that awaited them down at the bottom of the world.

Really, to-morrow he would have to explain quite frankly to Magda and start on something with all his energy. He hadn't been completely idle for so long for centuries.

You couldn't very well explain to Magda that you would feel happier if you knew she was keeping away from Sorensen. He was the captain, and she was his compulsory guest. She would take offence, too, and say you didn't trust her and were hinting at horrible things.

She wouldn't make a scene, but her ultramarine eyes would fill with tears and the richest mouth in all the world would tremble, and you would feel a swine and a cad, and practically drive her into the toad's arms.

Yes, awkward.

It would have to be done.

The air had chilled. Little, querulous sooty birds beat about, scolding, complaining. He who had always mocked at the sweater-boys—and the sweater-girls, if it came to that—was glad of the rough woollen thing he had bought with a chit from Sorensen's deep slop-chest.

If it hadn't been for Magda he would have been the first to admit that Captain Sorensen was a very competent master of an exceptionally well-found ship. Even knowing nothing about the sea or sailing-ships, common sense told him that. Sorensen hadn't expected all these passengers, and yet, if one viewed the situation in proper perspective, he was doing more than well by them. Admittedly, but there was, of course, Magda. No escaping from that, and no escaping from Sorensen.

Men and women were never intended to exist in a world which would have been too small and cramped for midgets.

Mr. Bramerton climbed up to the poop. He looked very odd and less like a millionaire than ever in a fantastically checked thigh-length coat—the kind of thing lumbermen wore in American films. It hung in folds on his spare frame. He smoked the stub of a cigar.

"I have just finished some more chess with our captain," he said, and it crossed Martin's mind that the wise old man was really telling him that he had no reason to wonder where Magda had got to. It was possible. His heart warmed to Mr. Bramerton. "Do I intrude? Do I interrupt the mysteries of your craft?"

"Good lord, no," said Martin. "You should, but you don't. I was just loafing, and looking at the ship and thinking of nothing at all. Of course, one can't do that—I was thinking of nothing at all that was of any use."

"Mademoiselle Armande is a very intelligent person," Mr. Bramerton mused, seemingly apropos of nothing in particular. "Earlier this afternoon I had a talk with her about cement. She knows a lot about cement."

"She knows a lot about everything."

"She does, indeed. Leaning here with you, looking at the ship, I am reminded of the night she said Sorensen was quite right to put the *Albatros* first and that we were only parasites, or some such word, carried on her back."

"Yes," Martin said, "I remember that night."

"You have cause to," smiled Mr. Bramerton.

Martin was startled. How could such an old, old man, lost in the mazes of his wealth, know there was anything special about that particular night?

"I don't get it."

"Surely it's natural enough. It was a remarkably beautiful evening, and her chance remark impressed us all. Or at least it impressed me."

"Oh, me, too," Martin said, but still he wondered.

"Why I mentioned the matter was that it strikes me how little we people know about the *Albatros* or her real life. We are as isolated as if we had Yellow Jack—or whatever the term was. I keep finding such half-remembered words in my head. No doubt I am in my second childhood, and I must say it's a very happy state. Words like 'mizzen,' 'foretop gallants'—I've probably got them all wrong, but I've less idea than ever what they mean. They make, however, a queer kind of lost music in my mind, like the half-remembered air of some nursery rhyme."

"I know just what you mean," said Martin, with warmth. "Just what you mean. It's been irking me, too. The only one of the lot of us who knows anything really about the *Albatros* is Brown."

"Ah," said Mr. Bramerton, raising a finger which revealed rheumatic tendencies, "but there's a point: she isn't one of us—she isn't clever or rich or beautiful. She is a young woman working her passage by working in a ship where everybody except the passengers is working, and the old ship, who's probably older than I am even, is working hardest of all."

"Mademoiselle Armande has been doing you good," Martin spoke lightly, but was warmed again. He had never met a wise or lovable millionaire before.

"Of course she has. She always does. She would do anyone good. Excuse my enthusiasm, but she is the very first Frenchwoman I have ever admired in a long life. I have never met one before who had such a clean mind and body

and soul, or such clean hair. They are always beautifully coiffeured, of course, and scented, and we know how much more sensible they are in their personal hygiene than English, or even American, women, but I must admit that they have never seemed especially clean to me."

Mr. Bramerton sniffed. For a man of his age he had amazingly well-cut nostrils, fine and sensitive.

On the spur of the moment, out of his vague, unanalysed mood, Martin said, "You make me feel like a schoolboy, sir."

"What a very nice tribute," said Mr. Bramerton. "And what a very good service. It must be the result of that second-childhood of mine I was mentioning. Perhaps it's because I'm happy for the first time in ages. There is really only one flaw I find aboard the *Albatros*. Ah, mademoiselle, do join us."

Mlle Armande did so. She still wore the costume in which she was saved. It looked a little the worse for wear, but remained smart and a part of her.

"Hullo?" she said. "Aren't I butting in? You look as if you were in conference."

"Not at all, my dear," said Mr. Bramerton.

"You butt in?" said Martin, for the first time giving her the Trevellion smile at full power. "What a crazy idea!"

She looked, now one came to look at her, so crisp and sensible and intelligent. Of course, he'd known that all along, but at the moment the impression was most striking. As Mr. Bramerton had said, she knew about cement—and any woman who could give him the feeling that she was really worth talking to about his precious white dust must know a host of things.

"I was just remarking that I find only one flaw in this life of ours, mademoiselle—something that makes me uneasy and less the schoolboy I feel in other ways."

"You mean Doctor Himmelmann?"

"You see?" said Mr. Bramerton to Martin, much pleased. "I mean, of course, Doctor Himmelmann. There is something seriously amiss about the business of Himmelmann. The man is badly burned—probably made into a monster for life. Captain Sorensen had not forgotten him on the Sunday the liner passed. Our captain plays far too good a game of chess ever to overlook any pawn. He is playing some game

with Himmelmann, as he is, of course, with all of us. But what game?"

"I can't imagine," said Martin. "What has he to gain?"

"That is beyond me. But I was a reluctant witness of a very strange interview between the pair of them in the captain's cabin. Himmelmann for some reason thinks he can bully Sorensen. It is not a thing I would attempt myself, and I have bullied bigger men than the captain of an old sailing-ship. I speak no German, but I have eyes in my head. It was the queerest scene. Your toad, Martin, was in his element. He loved every moment. He spat no venom —it's only in fables that toads do—but he was a terrible imp of a man. He even delayed having Himmelmann locked up whilst we had another drink. He had obviously been threatened, but he revelled in the sense of power. Now why should our Captain Sorensen do that? He is no common bully. He is sagacious and intelligent and within this little world an absolute monarch. Why should he act in this way?"

Mlle Armande, without bothering to interrupt by offering them round, had lit a cigarette, dexterously, as if she had dwelt on the poop of a four-masted barque all her life. Sorensen or Larsen couldn't have done it better. She was a most accomplished woman.

"God knows," Martin said.

Mlle Armande inhaled and took her time about releasing the smoke.

"Do you really want to know, Mr. Bramerton?"

"I do."

"Even if it is something unhappy and evil which will throw a deeper shadow on your school holidays?"

"Of course, for the man is on my mind already."

"And you, Martin?"

"Why, naturally. After this build-up I'd want to know if Himmelmann were the devil himself."

Mlle Armande shook her helmet of silver.

"Oh, no," she said. "Nothing so exciting as that. Himmelmann claims to be Hitler."

She said it quietly, conversationally.

"Hitler?"

Mr. Bramerton and Martin named the name out of the dead days in unison, awed, amazed.

"So he claims."

"Impossible!"

"Incredible!"

Mlle Armande flicked cigarette ash and shrugged.

"I grant you," she said, "but that was what he was mouthing to our collaborating captain just where we are standing that day the *Andean Star* passed by. If you hadn't all been so excited, even without German you must have guessed."

One on either side, each a big man in his world, they looked down at little Mlle Armande like yokels.

"No!" said Mr. Bramerton.

"Old Hitler's been dead for donkey's years—dead and forgotten. As much so as Mussolini. Or almost."

"Oh, yes, you don't have to tell me that. I was in Berlin in 1945 myself. I know all about Hitler's death. I saw many dossiers. I refuse to believe that this is Hitler, this burnt-up man. But Captain Sorensen, he is entitled to his opinion, also."

They stood in silence, while wind and ship and sea went on with their endless talk.

"It would explain a lot, everything, about the queer case of Doctor Himmelmann," said Mlle Armande.

"It would," said Mr. Bramerton thoughtfully, looking back at the interview he hadn't understood.

"But damn it all," Martin burst out, "we all know the toad just loved the Germans. He's the first to admit they've put him where he is. If he had Hitler aboard he'd be licking his boots and doing whatever he ordered. It's only natural."

"You're much younger than you appear in some of your work, Martin," said Mr. Bramerton in mild rebuke. "The present situation is far more natural. Come, Martin, you're the writer, and I am only the businessman. You must know your Sorensen fairly well by now for various reasons. Can't you see what a perfect chessman he has to play with? Imagine his enjoyment! I shouldn't have to tell you this."

"No," admitted Martin, "you shouldn't. But aboard this blasted *Albatros* I'm only a ghost myself."

"Perhaps I should have kept my counsel?" said Mlle Armande.

"No," said Mr. Bramerton, "but it's very disturbing. I

wish I'd gone home on that mail-boat. The only reason—or one of the reasons—I stayed was for peace."

"It's what used to be called 'a bromide,'" said Mlle Armande, "but peace is hard to find. My job's taught me that. I'm more disappointed than you are, and I don't want to handle the story a bit, though it's the story of a journalist's lifetime. Look out! Here's the captain. What a clever rascal he is! I wonder if among the other amenities his quarters are wired for hidden dictaphones? Well, captain, this is, what I think you call, good sailing weather?"

Sorensen slip-slopped up to them, grinning.

"So, yes, he is goodt. On such a wind as this the *Albatros* sails like a bat out of hell. I am right?" They nodded. He waved his cigar, inviting their approval of rounded sails and the ship's thrusting progress. "And you, my dear friendts, you talk happily together?"

"Oh, yes," said Mlle Armande.

"And yet not quite," said Martin.

"No," said Mr. Bramerton, "because, captain, we've been worrying about Himmelmann."

"Not more than me, no! It is badt that he should have to be locked there in his cabin, and yet it is only for his own goodt—it is the thing that must be done. He is not right in his head, that one. He is as mad as a hare in March. My only deep regret is that I did not think in time to tranship him to the *Andean Star*. They would have saved me many headaches, yes. I deplore myself."

Mr. Bramerton folded his arms and looked down from his cornstalk height at Captain Sorensen.

"Who is Himmelmann?" he demanded.

Captain Sorensen held out reasoning, long-fingered hands. He was puzzled by such a pointless question; he protested, civilly, against it.

"As you all know," he said, "he is a German born in Argentina who was most wickedly treated during the old War by those Nazis. He has shown to me his papers, and to me has told everything. But the aero crash has made him barmy and mad. Come, I tell you something. Come a bit closer, yes. He has, what do you say, a possession——?"

"An obsession," Martin supplied.

"That is goodt, that is right: an obsession. Through talking so much with Magda I improve my English slang"—he

gave Martin the hint of a bow—"but sometimes I still don't find the right school-book word. That is goodt: he has an obsession that he is—now who do you think?"

"Hitler," said Mlle Armande.

"That is clever of you, or would be if it were a guess, but you are speaking the German as I know, and so it was not hard for you that have heard his so barmy ravings. Yes, that is what he really does think. It is badt. Very badt." He wagged his head.

Mr. Bramerton, arms still folded, still looked down at the little grinning man.

"Is he Hitler?"

"Mr. Bramerton, dear friendt, there is only one thing certain and that is that, as we say, he is barmy. The looney-bins—see how goodt Magda teaches to me, Mr. Trevellion? —I don't doubt they are full of Hitlers. There must be many poor barmy people like our so poor friendt who aren't even in looney-bins, yet who have the same idea. That is all I can tell you, that is all I know. See, I have been frank with you as daylight. And now I suppose my so fine ship becomes a looney-bin, too. Ach, that fellow Himmelmann—what a nuisance is him!"

The angry little sooty birds whirled about, arguing, debating.

III

And the debating and argument went on in the *Albatros*.

Martin knew that in any ship at sea the most trivial event becomes a Dreyfus case. There was the occasion in the twenty-thousand-ton P. & O. liner when the word went round that the major who was running the sports committee had omitted the damning word "sergeant" from the front of his title. The scandal had been almost enough to put the flagship of the Peninsula and Oriental line ashore on Perim because the electric disturbance had played havoc with the compasses. That dreadful thing had happened in a metropolis of the oceans, carrying probably two thousand souls in brief transit.

Yet how did it compare with the sensation which had rocked their little hamlet in which they had been isolated for ages and would remain isolated for ages longer?

No wonder at the end of dinner, when the captain and his second mate rose to leave them, Sorensen, with his sardonic grin, said, "Good talking, then." There was only one thing they could talk about, but that was enough. He tilted up his newly lit cigar and slip-slopped off to his own domain.

The villagers seemed to draw closer together; they looked with awe at the locked door of the brown cottage where their mystery man dwelt; they pictured him in his grim white armour lying there, with what memories in his mind?—with what thoughts? His presence haunted the saloon. They almost expected the solid wood to dissolve and reveal him, glaring at them, the old enemy, the dangerous beast, burnt and scarred but still undestroyed.

Mr. Bramerton sighed.

"It's strange how we children love a bogyman," he said. "For all our peace of mind it would be so much more sensible just to accept the fact that he is a poor fellow who has suffered much and whose wits are deranged."

"That's what I think, anyway," said Magda. "Poor little old Hitler bumped himself and his lady friend off. Everyone knows that. Just like Musso and his lady friend were hung upside down that time in Italy. Doctor Himmelmann's no more Hitler than I am. You can't be someone that everybody knows is dead. It doesn't make sense."

She sat back, beautiful in her pride, much pleased with this long effort in logic. They looked at her, and nodded, smiling. It was always a pleasure to look at Magda.

"I agree with you," said Mr. Bramerton. "That is the simple and natural and proper view. You stick to it, my dear."

"I'm going to," said Magda. "Worrying never did any good. It only gives you wrinkles. And if it comes to that, suppose he is little old Hitler—who cares? He's down and out."

"I prefer to think of him as dead as well," said Mlle Armande. "A pest is always better exterminated. Whilst there's life in them they breed trouble. The world has enough of that. If Himmelmann is even the charred remnants of Hitler, it would be better that he didn't get ashore alive."

"Are you suggesting, mademoiselle," asked Martin, "that it would be our duty to see he didn't?"

"I am convinced of it," she said with quiet finality.

"Oh, upon my soul," said Mr. Bramerton, "how unpleasant one's duty always seems to be. Really, my dear, to sit there smoking a cigarette and suggest that we shall have to—to do away with an injured man—that's very bad for the digestion."

"Mad dogs don't recover," said Mlle Armande. "They have to be destroyed. But you British will never face facts like that. You never hate your enemies—you only make schoolboy jokes about them."

"He must be Hitler," smiled Martin. "He's causing trouble already among the United Nations. As if there wasn't enough——!"

"Exactly!" said Mlle Armande. "That's what I meant."

"It's strange to think," said Brown, "just imagining for a moment that he isn't really Himmelmann, what a lot of trouble he must have gone to disguising himself and changing his appearance. If what Jorgen hints is true no one will ever know him again."

"Yes, there's a kind of justice in that," said Martin.

"There's another point we've overlooked," said Mr. Bramerton. "Supposing he is Himmelmann and isn't mad. We all know what a stubborn dictator our good captain is. Suppose Himmelmann, learning Sorensen had been on the German side, desperate to get ashore for treatment, all else failing, decides on this magnificent bluff. Hidden in those bandages he would know he made a mysterious figure. What a brilliant move! And if it won the game, once he was ashore he would be just Himmelmann, and what could the captain do about that?"

"By Jove, yes," cried Martin, "you've got something there. And what a laugh he'd have on the toad!"

"Only your toad is a cunning toad," said Mr. Bramerton. "Rest assured he would be aware of that."

"All the same, I think Himmelmann will beat him in the end, even if he cannot get what he wants," said Martin. "I hope he does. I'd like to see that cocky little devil taken down a few pegs. I see how it could be done, and if I got the chance I'd give Himmelmann the tip."

"Oh, Martin," Magda protested, "you wouldn't do anything horrid to the dear Cap?"

"Would he not?" said Mlle Armande. "It is, you know,

a natural antipathy between them, Magda. Martin just can't help disliking Sorensen."

She smiled, innocently.

"Your tip would be wasted," said Mr. Bramerton. "If he's mad he couldn't take it, and if he's sane, either as Himmelmann or Hitler, he's got a much more ingenious mind than you have, Martin, and he'd have thought of it for himself."

"I suppose so," conceded Martin, "for it's the simplest thing in the world, though it's quite infallible. All he has to do is to recover and admit he's been off his head. Any psychiatrist would agree that it would be natural for one of Hitler's victims who had suffered a great shock to become the victim in turn of such a delusion. And as nobody on earth could identify him now, that would be the end of the matter."

"There would be a certain drollness in the prospect of Hitler living out the rest of his days having to deny himself and looking a figure as horrible as death itself," said the Frenchwoman.

"There'd be a certain drollness in seeing old Sorensen sold up the creek, too," said Martin.

Though their talk went round in a circle and could get them nowhere, they couldn't leave the subject. What might well be a world-sensation had happened in the hamlet of the *Albatros*. They would not have been villagers if they had been able to think of anything else.

Captain Sorensen, sitting in the gold of the candles, listening to the music of his tiny, jewelled bird, might have been listening to them to judge by his grin. Indeed, he had no need to listen, for he knew very well what they were saying. As he had boasted he had been frank with them as daylight, but he had not burdened them with too much of poor Himmelmann's ravings. He had not, for instance, mentioned the one point in them, which, if true, would give him all the proof he needed of his passenger's identity. If the British Government had recalled that 'plane because of something it had found out about Dr. Himmelmann, the game grew a lot clearer.

IV

Four days later in his rôle as the wise old father of the party —he had not sought the part, Martin knew, but the mantle had fallen on him inevitably—Mr. Bramerton made a sudden announcement after breakfast.

"I have a motion to propose."

"How lovely!" said Magda. "Just like one of those meetings they have in the City. I've heard about them."

"I'll bet," said Mlle Armande.

"It's really quite a simple motion, and I think it will find favour. We can do nothing about this wretched Himmelmann. He will continue to haunt us, and the ship, but there's no reason and no purpose in going on and on about him. Hitler or Himmelmann, he's there and that's that. I propose from this moment on we do not mention his name and think about him as little as possible. Will someone second that?"

"With all my heart," said Martin. "I never want to hear his name again, and I don't give a hoot in hell about him. I don't care what his face looks like, or looked like. I'm fed up with him. I hate his guts."

"Anybody say No?" Mr. Bramerton paused, looking politely, quizzically about. "Then I declare the motion carried unanimously. It won't be quite so easy to observe its terms, but I'm sure we shall all be happier if we do."

Magda clapped her hands.

"You are a pet," she said. "It was all so formal and like a meeting would be."

"We might try some code of penalties?" suggested Mlle Armande.

"No use in our queer little village where we're all living on tick," Martin said.

"I agree," said Mr. Bramerton. "The real penalty must be that whoever contravenes is a nuisance to the rest of us, and that, in our narrowing world, is the unforgivable sin."

He was right, as usual. The weather was very different from that which had seemed so dull and emptily blue. The *Albatros* flew on, wide wings spread, into her native waters. Captain Sorensen had warned them.

V

Aboard a real ship, a modern and civilised ship, a ship like, say, the *Andean Star*, the weather only mattered if you were a really bad sailor, and even if you were you had a white and gleaming cabin, electric light, a solicitous steward to bring you champagne and dry biscuits. If the mere motion didn't worry you a nose could be thumbed at the ocean. There were miles of covered decks, brightly or discreetly lit to choice: there were acres of bars and ballrooms and lounges and palm courts. Let it rain, let it blow: life went on; through storm and calm the ship went on, also.

Aboard the *Albatros* it was very different. The weather ruled everything—the ship and the lives of those luckless enough to sail her. The weather struck her dead or filled her with vibrant life; the weather made the decks more romantic than atolls with palms and blue lagoons, or turned them into a bleak wilderness where wretched men who had to be about their business huddled into sodden oilskins and cursed the stormy darkness and the seas sweeping inboard and the drenching torrents.

Aboard the *Andean Star* the cabins opened off long, gleaming and impersonal alleyways where, using the most modest discretion, you were free to do almost as you liked, being the inhabitants of a city.

Aboard the *Albatros* every cabin opened off the saloon, where, in these times, all the life of the ship centred. At any hour of the night Captain Sorensen might pad out, or any other of the ship's people pass about their incomprehensible duties, or another passenger might pop from one of the brown cells. This was no city where people went their own ways, and didn't care so long as they weren't interfered with. This was the eternal village, narrow and agog and eager for any titbit to break the monotony of life. Though it ranged across the oceans it remained just that.

With or without Magda, Martin should have been in his natural sphere aboard the *Andean Star*. He had realised that long ago. But still too late. And by now she had docked and set her happy passengers ashore. They had almost forgotten their voyage, and the sailing-ship they had seen belonged with the flying-fish and porpoises and deck-tennis and

the sweepstake on the day's run. They were done with the sea, until the next time they had to go somewhere.

Martin could have been one of them if he hadn't made his fine gesture, which at the time had seemed so warranted.

And it had been, of course. He couldn't have, he wouldn't have, left Magda behind. It would have been like cutting off his right hand; it would have been unthinkable. Cruel and unjust to feel that it was her fault that he remained a prisoner in this drab and alien world, which grew colder and greyer and duller and more stupid every day. He had stayed of his own free will, because she was so worth staying for, because she was the loveliest thing he'd ever set eyes on. To blame her was like stamping on a rose for spite that skies had turned cold or you didn't like the house in which you found yourself.

Nevertheless you couldn't sit with Magda in the crowded saloon and talk to her. There was nothing to talk about—nothing. She was a vision still in the light of the slowly swinging oil-lamps; every time he looked at her his blood quickened—but what was the use of that? She had never been designed by Nature, who had been so kind to her, to be buried in a village. Anywhere else one could have gone on loving her, however, and that was the devil of it.

He cursed Sorensen.

They were teaching Magda bridge. At first Martin had protested that he loathed the game. He did, in a way. He would never have bothered to play in the *Andean Star*, for instance. There would have been many better things to do.

But in the *Albatros* the silent pasteboard people, with their endless cunning and their life which lay quite outside the human world and their unpredictable commutations and conjunctions, proved fascinating. They were a potent drug and a blessed escape. He would have been happy to play bridge until they reached that *ultima Thule* which Sorensen called Port Lincoln. It was dope, of course, but harmless, helpful dope in the circumstances. The trouble was that Magda had not only never learnt bridge, but never would. The fact was blatant. Yet she couldn't just be allowed to look on, and she wouldn't have been prepared to do so. The alternative for her was games of quite another sort with Sorensen. That was unthinkable.

They sat, the four of them, at one end of the long table

in the saloon. It was the fourth night of Magda's instruction. The skylight was closed, but the noise of the sombre and stormy world outside came strongly into the stuffy place. The ship creaked and rose and fell. Captain Sorensen had told them that this was, "Nodings, but nodings!" That was true enough, no doubt. Above their heads, however, the poop, open to the sky, ruled by the elements, was no place to be. Even less so the once enchanted triangle in the bows.

If only Magda had been born with any kind of card sense it would not have been so ghastly. No woman could have everything, of course, but since cards were the only sport they could find at the moment it was a pity. It wasn't her fault, poor lovely rose, but it remained a pity, and very painful.

She picked up her hand.

"I didn't think bridge would be such fun," she said, happy and glorious, "but now that I'm getting the hang of it, it really is."

"I, too, have never known bridge could be so funny!" Mlle Armande spoke calmly but from deep feeling. She was, Martin knew, a shrewd and intelligent player, though in the circumstances she had had little chance to demonstrate it.

"Quite," said Mr. Bramerton, and coughed dryly. To a man who had been married and divorced five times, and had lived as long as Mr. Bramerton, cards were important people who were usually kinder to a millionaire than anyone. He, in return, liked to treat them with respect.

Martin writhed, and sighed again for the *Andean Star*.

"Oh, Martin," cried Magda to her partner, "I've a whole handful of Hearts. I love Hearts, don't you? They look so pretty and romantic."

"You mustn't tell me what you've got, Magda."

"But I didn't mean to. I was only so excited."

"Of course, child." Mr. Bramerton was horribly patient. "When I consider you I don't wonder all the Hearts have come your way, though I'd like to put you across my knee and spank you all the same. I've an idea. Let's put our hands down just once more, and we'll explain to you how the bidding would have gone and that'll help you."

Magda pouted. Martin longed to kiss her mouth, but he couldn't and they were playing contract. He choked back the groan when the hands were layed down, and a grand

slam with all the honours and game and rubber died an unnatural death.

"That's a pity, Magda," said Mr. Bramerton, still patiently, but sad for his massacred playmates. "Now if you hadn't just burbled out what you had there would have been a killing. I would have called——"

He went through it all for the hundredth time.

"I'm so sorry," said Magda, drooping and contrite briefly, "but they did look so pretty. All those Hearts. I won't ever do it again, and I think I've really got the hang of it all now." She hadn't taken in a word, and would probably have called Spades in any case. "Can you read the cards, mamsel?"

"No," said Mlle Armande, "I only read hands."

Now Magda's attention was really captured. She forgot all about silly bridge and offered a hand any artist would have drawn and redrawn and drawn again for sheer joy.

"Silly," smiled Mlle Armande, "you've already shown me the only hand that interests me when I'm playing contract."

She nodded at the grand slam in Hearts, and as she did so had to regret being cruel to Magda, just because she was Magda. But it didn't matter.

"You are a tease," said Magda. "Now let's really start playing seriously. I've heard gentlemen say the cards never forgive, but they'll forgive me, I bet."

"They'll have to," said Mr. Bramerton, no longer so patiently but very sweetly. "Believe it or not, they have eyes in their heads and see us folk who play with them."

"Oh, you are funny," laughed Magda, who knew she'd been paid a compliment though she didn't understand it.

Mlle Armande and Martin, their eyes meeting, shared a happy moment of understanding and companionship in which they agreed that their dusty old millionaire was a dear.

VI

Time had ceased to mean anything, but Martin realised that the full gale had hounded and flayed the ship for at least a week. He lay in his bunk, wedged in with pillows, eyes closed, neither asleep nor awake, seasick and yet not sea-

sick, just numb and comatose and bored and weary and most damnably uncomfortable.

Below him, he knew and didn't care, was Mr. Bramerton in similar condition.

For the first few days the passengers had huddled in the saloon, clinging to the table, trying to occupy themselves, feeling that, with their lot so much better than that of the wretched real people of the *Albatros*, they should make the best of it. But there was no best to be made. Talk was useless; cards no help; even had books been available they couldn't have read them in the pandemonium; the sight of each other's grey, strained, cheerless faces had become hateful.

"I am going to bed," Mr. Bramerton had said, "and I am going to resume life when life becomes worth living again."

He was old, and was very wise.

"What a wizard idea!" said Magda.

"Those other poor devils," said Mlle Armande, "must carry on, but we should be utter fools to go on being martyrs."

They had crawled away from the cold, dark, dank saloon to the warmth and relative peace of their blankets and bunks, counting themselves fortunate to be able to do so.

Above the seas thundered over, burying the decks feet deep in surging white water, in frozen raging tides, which, day after day, held the crew under the imminent threat of death or injury. There was no pause, no truce with the ocean.

Martin shuddered when he thought of what hell it must be up there. How wisely Captain Sorensen had spoken when he said the English milord would not want to work his passage! With all his clothes piled on top of him, at least dry and inert in his bunk, Martin for once was grateful to the toad. No fare would have been too high a price to pay for not having to take part as an actual combatant in this battle with the merciless Great Southern Ocean.

With the galley constantly flooded, food became rough and scanty. That did not matter. Nobody wanted to eat; nobody wanted to do anything.

The *Albatros* shook and shuddered and strained, reeled and pitched. She was hurled up into the skies and down

into the depths; she was flung this way and that; the waves roared across her and the wind screamed. Surely under such a pounding anything made by man must disintegrate?

Well, if she went to bits at least he would be done with the sea. That would be the ultimate mercy.

He had moments of sharp and unnatural clarity when he saw himself and Magda and life all too plainly, as if under a microscope. He grew to hate the specimens almost as much as the shaken test-tube in which they were housed, and studied them with a sour and sardonic eye. It was a mercy that more often he lay for long hours in an unhappy coma, even forgetting to curse the day when he had jumped from the imagined threat of death into this life which was so much worse than death could ever be, since death was peace and oblivion.

He braced his knees against the side of the bunk as Sorensen's hateful ship fell into a new convulsion.

VII

The fury abated, subsided, died. The ship drove on, but although Martin, along with everyone else, found his spirits returning to normal, something of the shadow of those dark hours remained on him, particularly when he thought of Magda and the utterly false relationship which had been forced on them by their environment.

Now the sea ran in smooth, grey-green ranges streaked with white veins of quartz. Long galleys of cloud sailed fast against the cold, clear upper blue. The decks gleamed wetly. Surges of foam, white and bright as snow, flared away from the bow as it dropped down into another hill and rose again. The albatrosses swooped and swung on motionless wings, high in the heavens, brushing an inch above the waters but never touching them. Round and round, up and down, effortless, sailing their dizzy arcs, they were the very poetry and soul of flight. The eye followed their patterns with deep delight.

"And we are proud of our aeroplanes," Mr. Bramerton remarked.

He had added a red muffler and a pair of coarse tweed trousers to his wind-breaker. He wore a cheap cloth cap

pulled down to his ears, and pennants of white hair fluttered out from beneath it. Martin, too, had drawn on his credit with Captain Sorensen. His jacket was even gayer than Mr. Bramerton's; his wide trousers flapped.

"If I had those wings and that freedom," he said, "I wouldn't waste my time down here."

"And yet they seem to like this part of the world," said Mr. Bramerton. "I don't know that I've ever seen any kind of creature more at home and happy in its natural element."

"It isn't mine."

"Most obviously." Mr. Bramerton considered the ship. "It's clear," he said, with enjoyment, "we are not scudding under bare poles, but I should say we are quite probably running down into the roaring Forties close hauled. Or have we left the roaring Forties far behind?"

"I wouldn't know."

"It sounds fine, though, doesn't it?" asked Mr. Bramerton. "I mean, even if it's wrong?"

"It sounds fine."

"Ah," said Mr. Bramerton, turning over the phrases and others akin to them, "never be afraid of growing old, Martin, so long as you welcome your second childhood with open arms and do as the owl and the pussy-cat did and put to sea in a beautiful pea-green boat. That's right, isn't it, pea-green? It's an eternity since I thought of it."

"I think 'pea-green' is right though it doesn't make sense. But what nursery rhyme ever did?"

"True," said Mr. Bramerton. "True. So few things make sense. I have often wanted to remark 'Hey-diddle-diddle' at conferences on which millions turned." He paused, only to continue on the same inconsequential note, just saying whatever came into his head. "If I were you, Martin, I'd not worry too much about falling out of love with Magda."

Martin jumped.

"Out of love?" he echoed, too surprised to do more.

"Yes," said Mr. Bramerton, rambling on. "It would have happened anyway, anywhere. Even if you'd got away with her in the *Andean Star*. And then it would have been much more unhappy. I suppose I'm an impertinent old dotard, but forgive me my trespasses, young man, because I

happen to be fond of you both, odd though it may seem. Don't bother to answer my droolings. Let's watch our albatrosses. If I remember aright they're supposed to be the souls of sailors, aren't they—sailors drowned at sea?"

"Why, yes, I believe so," said Martin with a corner of his mind.

"I have never fancied drowning as a means of death," said Mr. Bramerton. "Seeing all one's past life, and so on. If it comes to that I've never fancied death at all, which is a pity in view of my situation. But really, watching these birds, I feel inclined to drop quietly overboard. As usual, there's a catch. I don't suppose I could qualify as a sailor by any manner of means. Any more than you could. But reverting to Magda for a moment—she will be all right. There's no use you making yourself miserable trying to keep alive something that's dead. Bury your love at sea, and perhaps it will turn into an albatross."

"I've already buried one love at sea this voyage," Martin heard himself admitting, and was surprised.

"Oh, these loves," said Mr. Bramerton airily. "At my age one realises that we make far too much fuss about them. They come and go. To satisfy our own egotism we make them out to be fearfully important, but are they? There was a girl I could have married when I was a boy. Her name was Ruby. It's not a fashionable name these days, I suppose. I didn't marry her, but I married Pauline and Francesca and Harriet and the other two. I might have married any five others. I don't think really it would have mattered a great deal. If you'd never set eyes on Magda, and the odds were long against you doing so, you'd have been none the wiser. And you won't hurt Magda. I can tell you that. She's not vulnerable, though she'd never understand the term because we use it at Contract. A girl like Kathie Brown or a Mademoiselle Armande might be hurt for a while, but not Magda. She will fall on her perfect feet, I promise you."

Martin gave Mr. Bramerton a boyish grin.

"You're wasted as just a cement millionaire," he said. "You should have been the Archbishop of Canterbury—or something."

"Believe me, cement is just as important as anything in an archbishop's stock in trade. If you want to know about

cement, or any other valuable merchandise, have a good talk with Mademoiselle Armande."

"You and Sorensen love playing chess, don't you?" Martin laughed.

"Granted, granted," said Mr. Bramerton. "Forgive an old man of the sea for being so foolish and obvious. Let's forget all about it, and get back to the only thing that's going to save our sanity if the weather gets really bad. I mean of course, Contract. I think we may as well give up the hopeless task of teaching our lovely Magda. After even this unholy respite I can't face it. Armande and you and I could play some keen three-handed games. It would be a kindness to Magda, and to all of us. Since it's my idea, just leave it to me. I wouldn't hurt the divine creature for anything."

Martin experienced a sharp sense of relief.

"If you can fix it," he said.

"I am a good fixer," said the millionaire.

Of course the idea that he had fallen out of love with Magda was fantastic—not even worth denying. And now he came to think of it he hadn't denied it. That was just as well. One couldn't stand and discuss such a point. And Mr. Bramerton's interest was entirely kindly and impersonal.

Another irksome feature of their life that Mr. Bramerton should be in a position to know anything about his feelings for Magda and their relationship. In London they would have met and got on famously, but no privacies would have been violated. Once again the trouble sprang from living in a village—that was the root of all mischief. He had stayed on there, instead of sailing away in a city to the cities, for Magda's sake, and now all they could do was to play bridge. You couldn't blame her for being silly about a silly card-game, any more than you could blame her for the weather or the unsuitability of the *Albatros* to the needs of lovers. They were the victims of a cranky joke of circumstances. His feelings towards her were quite unchanged. When they got to Port Lincoln—ah! To keep sane until then bridge was vital. It would be much the best for everyone, including Magda, if Mr. Bramerton could handle the situation.

VIII

"Bridge, Magda," said Mr. Bramerton, "is a stuffy old game for stuffy old people. It isn't your line of country at all, and I apologise for ever suggesting you should waste your time on it. Patience, as I say, is quite different. It's straight ahead and you can chatter to your heart's content, and there aren't a mass of tiresome rules to clutter up and spoil the fun. And the patience I've taught you is a grand game for two. Remember, red on black, black on red. There's no scoring or worrying. Scoring and worrying are all very well for ordinary folk, but not for you, Magda, not for you. No one would ever dream of playing bridge with a film-star or a musical-comedy actress or the like. It would be a sheer waste of time. Patience is quite another story. One would always play patience with the loveliest ladies. Captain Sorensen loves the game, and he'll be delighted you've picked it up so well. I don't think he'll find it as easy to beat you at your game as he does to beat me at chess, even though I'm a pretty good chess-player myself."

"You're a darling—you're wizard!" Magda leaned over, and took his hands in hers. Mr. Bramerton looked pleased. "I've enjoyed our bridge in a way, but I must admit this old place gets on my nerves a bit sometimes. It will be nice to have a game like patience to play in the Cap's love-nest. It's an awful waste to think of him sitting all alone in there. I'm sure he must be lonely very often, poor lamb."

"He is," said Mr. Bramerton, "he is. That was why he was so pleased when I told him I was going to teach you this afternoon. He's challenging you to a match to-night."

"What fun!" said Magda. "And I bet I'll beat him."

"You're a match for any man, Magda. If I were twenty years younger I wouldn't be wasting time on stupid bridge."

"But if you and I played patience," Magda pointed out, her eyes round and blue and innocent, "we could only play it in this horrid saloon. That wouldn't be half as much fun."

"How right you are, Magda!"

She was still holding his hands in hers. Her skin was smoother than satin, and life and warmth seemed to flow from

her into his bones which ached more than usual in this cold weather. The tight white sweater Captain Sorensen had found for her in his inexhaustible stores fitted her like a casing of marble. He sat smiling at her, old and dispassionate eyes enjoying her beauty as if it were that of a perfect piece of statuary. He had made several people happy; he had earned his fee.

CHAPTER FIVE

I

BROWN broached the matter in the captain's night-room. She loved the place. It was the Old France you saw out at Versailles and in the little museums you went into because it was raining. But instead of just being an exhibition with people tramping through on aching feet and guides repeating their worn-out patter, it was Captain Sorensen's own room built for his own joy. Easy to understand him doing a silly, expensive thing like that. He had been born poor, too. If she'd come into a fortune she might have done something of another kind equally silly. It wasn't just a matter of ostentation, however, of being newly rich. The room to him was only fun. Reality was the *Albatros*.

Jorgen hadn't minded when she had been promoted to take over this job. He had so much to do, particularly now that he was not only Himmelmann's doctor and nurse but also gaoler. Jorgen wouldn't have minded, anyway. He wasn't a steward at all, but a shining young Danish canary, to whom the whole voyage—apart from Himmelmann—was just a joke. He didn't care who made the captain's bed. But Brown was glad to do so. The linen was so fine, and his pyjamas were of silk it was a pleasure to handle.

Captain Sorensen leaned in the doorway smoking a cigar. The guides should have told him to put it out. He liked to watch her preparing his bed. He had said it needed the touch of a woman's hand. He was a dear old man, and the best boss she had ever worked for. So undemanding, so appreciative. And he treated you as part of the ship.

Everything in order, she turned about.

"Captain, I wonder if you'd do me a favour?"

"My dear Miss, of course. Particularly now in here when you have made my pretty room so nice. You demand of me?"

"Oh, nothing, captain," said Brown, remembering that one couldn't demand anything. "But what I would like is a bottle of Snaps, and I am working my passage, and I've no

money unless I borrow. You see how it is? I hate even saying it."

Captain Sorensen paused, and blew smoke-rings.

"So?" he said. "Now it seems that my stewardess, she becomes the drunkard. She must have Snaps. And what do I get for my precious Snaps, Miss?"

"Nothing, because I've nothing to give, captain. And I know you're only pulling my leg."

"Ach, 'pulling my leg'—yes, that I know. I know all the English slang. And you are right. And, of course, I think you are finding I pay you somedings quite goodt at the end now that you have real work to do. I am not the mean man, Miss, and I am rich, so it is goodt for you, if you stay goodt. But still, why do you want this Snaps? Sit, please. It is silly you standing there when on your feet you have been all the day."

Brown sat on the bed beneath the golden chubby Cupids with arrows aimed. It was an order.

"For my birthday. I thought it would be fun to give the passengers a drink. Have a little party. They're all nice to me."

Captain Sorensen scowled darkly.

"And you? Perhaps you haven't been nice to them? Perhaps they shouldn't be giving you the party out of all their money?"

"I'm sure they would," said Brown, "but, you see, they don't even know—they couldn't possibly—and it's my birthday and I want to give the present."

He leered at her with round eyes.

"Which birthday is this of yours, Miss?"

"I shall be twenty-eight."

"So you are as young as that, and you ask me for Snaps? This is my chance to drive a bargain. I must think about this." He drifted into the other room and put out his cigar. Brown remained sitting on the comfortable bed because it was good to have the weight off her feet. "So, you are not afraid of me?" said Captain Sorensen, returning, grinning. "You dare to sit there on my bed and ask me for a bottle of Snaps?"

"Why, yes, captain."

"And you are so right. I stop all this fooling. I was only trying to see if I could make you less real. I knew I

couldn't, and I am glad so. It is goodt. Please not to bother your head about this more than anything else. You shall have two bottles of Snaps, my dear Miss." He raised his hand and checked her gratitude. "To me it is nodings, but nodings. I am so rich a man. But I don't say that to impress you, Miss, no! You are impressed enough that I am the master of the *Albatros,* because you amongst them all are the only one who loves my ship and is of her. So you don't have to do nodings for your bottle of Snaps. You are a wise Miss of twenty-eight who has lived in that Paris. This shows that there is some goodt in me after all?"

Brown laughed.

"I don't need Snaps to teach me that. I am only going to say, thank you very much. You've been most generous. And now I must be off."

"A moment, please," said Captain Sorensen, barring the way out of his night-room with long arms. "There is one other thing."

"Yes?" said Brown, getting up off the comfortable bed with reluctance.

"I do now someding that I don't do for nobody else aboard, not for all the marvellous great people we have. For you only I do this because you are my so goodt and true a stewardess. This party of yours is to be given to all these so fine people by my stewardess in my day-room which is hers for the party. And there is, Miss, no rent to pay, and I don't even come."

"Of course you wouldn't charge me rent, captain, but you must come."

"No," said Captain Sorensen, "if I come, then it is my party, because I am much the greatest person there. I must be on duty up above. Perhaps I look in for a moment to give the party the air—am I right?"

"An air."

"The English, he's very funny. An air—the air? The Danish, I suppose, she's very funny to you, too?"

"Very."

"And yet you get on very goodt with that. That is goodt."

"Mademoiselle Armande's Danish is wonderful," said Brown.

"There is nothing she must learn, Miss. She is knowing all the answers, don't you say? But you are only a young

girl going ahead and working for your living, so that it is goodt to see you going ahead, yes. You are a wise young working girl, too. You could ask the so terrible and wicked Erik Ole Sorensen for favours and not be afraid."

"You're pulling my leg again, captain," said Brown. "I see myself, and I see you. I knew it was going to be all right aboard the *Albatros* the very first time we talked."

"Because you were all right," said Captain Sorensen, "because you were okay—see, I don't just talk from school-books. So you don't have to be in love with me because you are in love with my barque."

"No," said Brown, "I don't have to be in love—or not with you—although I love your barque."

Captain Sorensen made way for her, laying a long finger against his dot of nose and dropping a lid over one round eye.

"Please not to think me the old fool, Miss," he said. "I know all about all your heart, too."

Brown smiled at him, grateful and very happy, before she bustled away to get on with the job.

"You wouldn't be the master of the *Albatros*, if you didn't," she said. "And wouldn't deserve to be. And thank you so much for my birthday-present."

"It is nodings, nodings," said Captain Sorensen. "To do for you, it is nodings. Underneath all my nonsensings I am really a goodt man, Miss, or so I should like you to think."

"I think you are a very good captain, and your stewardess thanks you," said Brown in Danish, and went back to duty.

Captain Sorensen lit another cigar at the horn of the golden rhinoceros.

"It is too late for Erik Ole Sorensen to have for himself a nice working girl daughter like his sister Else used to be," he remarked to his golden dancing girl.

He spoke aloud, as sea-captains often do, being so much alone.

II

It was much the nicest birthday Brown could remember. When you had spent most of your life working in other

people's houses, with only the formal wishes of the master and mistress and the polite parrot-phrases of the children and the telegram from home, it was heaven to be hostess in a sumptuous room, and, having owned so little before, to own all the people in it. For, in an odd kind of way, they were all hers—there was her Martin Trevellion who had made her "yoomp" into this grand adventure, her Mr. Bramerton who called her his ministering angel, her Mlle Armande who was closer to her in understanding than any woman had ever been before, and Magda, her peerless doll.

The dear *Albatros* had given her all these, and made her rich.

And now she was a fine lady, the hostess, who did not have to raise a finger. Jorgen had put on his best steward's jacket for the first time, and was her spruce and bright butler. The cook in his galley amidships had made a fine cake at the request of the crew. She had cried a bit over that. And he had not rested there, but on his own account had sent tasty snacks which would not have been amiss at a cocktail-party in the Ritz or some such fabulous place.

Her so famous, great guests were happy, too. The austerity of the sea had made them most appreciative. They had been to many parties, but none better than this. They were like children at their first pantomime. All because they were aboard the *Albatros*. She had known from the first moment that the *Albatros* was her world.

They all teased her, of course.

"Imagine if I'd declared a birthday and asked the captain for the use of his room!" Martin smiled crookedly, ruefully, at the very thought.

"I fancied we only ate in this ship," said Mlle Armande, choosing among the fare spread out on golden trays. "It took you to know, Kathie, there was a chef aboard."

"That is the beauty of being our Miss Brown," said Mr. Bramerton. "To the rest of us the *Albatros* is only a canoe which saved us from watery graves and is damnably uncomfortable. To her it is a world to conquer, and most obviously she has conquered it. We find the crew strange figures, insulated from us, unapproachable, unknown. Yet they send to our Miss Brown a fine cake, presented by no less a person than the bosun. I admit I was awed by that."

"You're wizard, Kathie," said Magda, so shiningly happy

and beautiful that she had no need to be jealous. "Fancy being able to throw a party like this in this old boat! And I'll bet you didn't even have to sit on his lap——!"

"It would have been comical if I'd tried to!"

"It would have been very absurd and unkind," said Mlle Armande.

"Quite!" Martin and Mr. Bramerton nodded together.

"You are funny, you people," said Magda. "She's got a very nice little figure, and though she says she's twenty-eight, she looks much younger. If I were a gentleman I wouldn't find anything whatever you said about Kathie sitting on my lap. I mean——"

"Kathie," Martin interrupted, "there's something you've always promised to tell me, and never have. You were in Paris when that old war broke out. How come you to manage to stay in France? Don't tell me you steered the same course as our gallant captain?"

"Oh, no," said Brown.

"This point interests me, too, and us all," said Mlle Armande. "Tell us the story, Kathie, and please don't regret that it is of no interest, like all your other stories."

"But really it's quite simple."

"You surprise us immediately," smiled Mr. Bramerton.

They wanted to hear; it would have been stupid to have to be urged any further.

"I was in Paris when the Germans were at the gates," she said, "and John saved me."

"An Englishman?" said Magda. "Give me an Englishman every time, or an American. I don't like these foreigners."

"His name was John, not Jean," said Mlle Armande, "and he was French?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," said Brown, close as ever to her Parisian, "as French as you. And his name was John."

"A rascal. What did he do? Sell filthy post cards?"

Brown and Mlle Armande were very happy together.

"I should think so, if there was money in it. He would do anything there was money in. He was a kind of hanger-on at the Casino de Paris. Nobody knew quite what he did. He would take English tourists to the amusing places, or get drugs for you, or arrange a meeting, or arrange a parting for just the little while that was important. There wasn't

anything that John wouldn't do. People who didn't like him said he'd cut a throat for five thousand francs."

"Not a mere gigolo," said Mlle Armande.

"Oh, no, and he wasn't even handsome. He was like Fernandel, but small and ratty—without being Fernandel."

"I see him," said Mlle Armande, delighted to be back in Paris.

"You mean to say, Kathie, you of all people fell for a horrible fellow like that—who sold dirty post cards?" Magda was amazed.

"Oh, no," said Brown. "And, of course, he didn't fall for me. He was married to one of the girls who used to be a governess. She was Scotch and very prim. They had two children, a boy and a girl."

"A pigeon pair," said Magda. "How nice! He couldn't have been so bad after all. I believe you're making it all up."

"You don't make this up, Magda," said Mr. Bramerton.

"When he saw trouble coming he shipped them away back to Inverness," said Brown. "I don't know if he could have gone with them. There wasn't much he couldn't do. Even in France he wasn't in the army or anything like that. He seemed to do just as he liked. He wouldn't want to go, anyway, because there was a lot of money to be made—more than in the boom years—if you were John. But he was too greedy. He stayed too late. I stayed too late because I was just silly. I didn't think it could happen."

"You believed in France?" said Mlle Armande.

"Yes."

"Perhaps it was silly of you, my dear, but I like you for it. I, too, believed in France; I still believe in her. I think you were right not to believe in the incredible. I didn't myself. But then my work happened to take me to America just at that time. It is easy to nourish high ideals and be brave in wartime if you are in America. You were trapped?"

"Almost," said Brown. "The family had gone off to Lyons ten days before, promising to come back and leaving me in charge of the apartment. Of course I knew by now that they had no intention of coming back, but I didn't know what to do. No one did in Paris. I couldn't just walk out —or that was the way I felt."

"That would be the way you'd feel, Kathie," said Martin.

"I'd have seen them further," said Magda, "if they'd played me a dirty trick like that."

"I don't think it was really a dirty trick. And they had the children to think of. After all, I was only a foreign girl in their employment. When people are scared they do queer things. Anyway, there I was, and then one evening, when I was really feeling pretty miserable, John appeared from nowhere. He gave me two minutes to put on my hat and coat and get a toothbrush. He said there was no time for explanations or talk. I was coming with him. All was arranged. I was so relieved to find a friend that I didn't argue, but did just as he said. And when I came back he had gathered together all kinds of tinned foods and things that belonged to the apartment. I was horrified, but John wouldn't listen.

"'These are wages you'll never be paid by those fat pigs,'" he said, and bustled me out, bumping me along in front of him, his arms full. Outside he had a huge Hispano which must have been stolen. It was full of petrol which must have been stolen, too. There was a ham and lots of wine and bread. They all must have been stolen. He bumped me into the back, throwing the stuff from the apartment in after me. Then he jumped into the front, and we were off like the wind in the next moment."

"This John," said Mlle Armande, "sounds an admirable courier. You must put me in touch with him. I feel he is the most useful man in Paris."

"But why should he come for you of all people?" asked Magda.

"Isobel, that was his Scotch wife, and I had always been friends. I was godmother to the two babies. I suppose he did it for their sake."

"He might have felt you were worth saving," said Martin. "I did once on a Channel crossing."

"But think of all the girls a man like that would know in Paris," Magda objected.

"Most of them were in the car," said Brown. "Or as many as could crowd in. Some were a bit tight, and some had very few clothes on. One had on nothing but a nightie. But they were all in great spirits. We sang and laughed and were glad. John said he had never handled so many first-grade white slaves in his life."

"I think I like John," said Mr. Bramerton.

"You wouldn't have," said Mlle Armande.

"Not in the ordinary way," Brown agreed. "You'd have said, 'Go away, man!'—and you'd have been right. But that night none of us found anything wrong with John. He got us away before the roads jammed and he drove south as if the devil was after us."

"He was," said Mlle Armande. "It must have been a droll journey."

"Oh, yes," said Brown. "All those marvellous girls, and me, and poor little John with his foot hard down on the accelerator, rushing down the Route Napoleon as if we were out on a terrific spree, and all the time, just because John was such a sharp rat of a chap, about a hundred kilometres ahead of disaster."

"This is a very good story," said Mr. Bramerton. "If you please, Jorgen."

"Sir," said Jorgen, playing his part with spirit.

"I'll bet this John had the time of his life," said Magda.

"The worst time of his life. Apart from marrying Isobel it was the only good thing he had ever done, I suppose. He was out to make a real job of it. He drove and drove, as if he was nailed to the wheel. When we ran out of petrol he held up a garage in the moonlight, using a spanner as a gun."

"Like on the flicks," said Magda. "But what happened at night when he wasn't driving?"

"There were no nights like that," said Mlle Armande.

"None," said Brown.

"I still say I like this John," said Mr. Bramerton.

"Me, too," said Martin.

"Neither of you," said Mlle Armande, "neither of you would have liked him one single little bit. For me it is different. I think this drug-peddlar, this pimp, this tout, was a pretty good Frenchman. There are worse things than that."

She was suddenly very French herself. She wouldn't let them like John—he was hers. She sang the Marseillaise, she waved the tricolour. The only cosmopolitan among them all she remained French through and through.

"And so?" said Martin.

"They were going on to Monte Carlo. They would all get

jobs there—the girls, I mean. John would be all right anywhere. But I didn't fancy the idea. I liked France."

"You loved France," Martin reminded her, and Mlle Armande smiled at him.

"Yes," said Brown, "I did. We stopped at a little village called Vence in the Alpes-Maritimes, and all tumbled out in the square under the plane trees to have a drink. The war seemed far away. John had borrowed or stolen some kind of clothes by now for the girls who hadn't any or hardly any. He had money, too, for cognacs and coffee. Don't ask me how. While we were there a funny kind of old Englishman came up and spoke to me. He was one of those trembly old Englishmen who always get what they want."

"I know them," said Mlle Armande. "They muddle through."

"He said there was a poor old English lady with arthritis living in a villa there with an old Italian maid almost as infirm as she was. They needed someone to look after them. He somehow picked me out from that strange crowd as a possibility. I suppose it wasn't so hard."

"No, Kathie," said Martin, "even a chump like me might have done that."

"And a trembly, doddering old Englishman was certain to," said Mlle Armande.

"You don't like the English, mademoiselle?" smiled Mr. Bramerton.

"No," said Mlle Armande, "but I fear and respect them, and I shall always expect them to win our wars for us."

She said it very well, with no malice and a shrug, her face young and winning in its silver frame.

"And you mean to say you left that cheery party, Kathie, to go and look after the old dame?" asked Magda.

"Yes. It was just another job." Brown glanced at Martin. "She had an annuity, and some money in the bank, and francs put by. She could just afford to buy enough for us to live on. Her name was Green. The peasants who loved her and helped to keep us from starvation always called her 'Mademoiselle Misgreen.' She had been good to them when she could, and they hadn't forgotten. And so I just stayed there, and when the Germans occupied the south they were very correct, and they didn't bother three useless, harmless women in a little villa. It was easier not to. We couldn't

hurt them, and they had enough on their hands. After it was all over I stayed on. I couldn't very well do anything else. The Italian maid, Amelia, died, and Mademoiselle Misgreen would have been helpless without me. Then she died and the villa was sold and the job was over."

"Surely she left you what she had, my dear?" asked Mr. Bramerton.

"I'm sure she intended to," said Brown. "But nobody ever expects to die. The annuity, of course, was finished, and the villa and so on was left to the Church of All Souls at some village in England where her father had been vicar. The will was among her papers. It was dated 1922, I remember."

"The wicked old thing," said Magda hotly. "And the All Souls people should have given every penny to you, anyway. The Church of England has got pots of money. Look at all those doubtful houses it owns round about Euston. It's a crying disgrace."

"And we met," Martin intervened, "when you were on your way home to get another job—just like that." He snapped finger and thumb.

"Yes," said Brown.

"For a little mouse of a thing," said Mlle Armande, "you have a way of making things happen to you."

"No," said Brown, "I don't make them happen. I just compete when they do."

Mr. Bramerton chuckled.

"I think, after careful consideration, I shall fall in love with Kathie Brown. She's much the nicest and wisest girl in the *Albatros*. Particularly as this is her birthday."

The door opened and Captain Sorensen shuffled in. Martin, remembering Mlle Armande's remark, wondered if he could possibly have had his ship wired for sound. His entries were always so nicely timed. His grin was wide, his parchment face benign. He jerked his head at the steward who left the cabin.

"So all has gone goodt, Miss?"

"It's been perfect, captain!"

Everyone supported that, warmly, happily. Strange to see Sorensen again, and be back in the old, familiar *Albatros*. Brown hadn't only thrown a party: she had taken them away for a while.

The steward appeared again with a tray on which were glasses and champagne.

"Now please not to thank me for this," said Sorensen. "This so fine end to so goodt a party is provided by our so rich and great millionaire." He grinned at Mr. Bramerton who had done nothing of the sort, but was very pleased that it had been done for him. A strange toad! For he hadn't acted from meanness. Mr. Bramerton knew that. He had done it simply to give pleasure to the man he beat at chess, who was also of goodt perception.

"Very nicely arranged, captain," said Mr. Bramerton, and he thanked Captain Sorensen with his eyes. "Just as I'd hoped. And now you, as our captain, must propose the toast."

Jorgen had been busy pouring the wine.

"That I do with the pleasure. Your glasses, they are ready? It is goodt, yes, and it shows that here in the *Albatros* we know how to do things in great, fine style when we feel like him." He blinked at them. "This is the toast then: To the Miss, the stewardess, very many so happy returns, as you say—may she be as happy then in her love as she is in her job aboard here."

"What a wizard speech," said Magda, and though she couldn't make out what the reference to love meant, it was only right to bring it in.

Brown stood blushing and happy, and she gave the knowing captain of her *Albatros* a little private smile.

Yes, a perfect birthday.

III

The grey and desolate world heightened Magda's beauty. Leaning there with her back against the rail, harsh yellow oilskins open to show tilted breasts in the snugness of creamy wool, hair bright as the flames of a bracken fire, eyes blue and lovely as the skies of high summer, she could have modelled for anything—the cover of a magazine, the jacket of a book, a poster for the latest film epic of the sea. He should have been counting himself the luckiest man alive to have had such beauty flung into his arms in the most unlikely setting. Supposing there had been only Sorensen and Brown—how would he have felt by now? He should have

been on his knees before the goddess. Instead he was bored by her, weary of her. It was unjust and unkind; it was the worst sort of folly from every point of view—but the fact remained that their brief passion had burnt itself out. If only Nature in her delight at creating such perfection hadn't forgotten to provide poor Magda with a mind!

Out in the world the break would have been much easier. There would have been a parting—stormy or tearful or painful—and they would have gone their own ways. But in the *Albatros* they must remain cooped up together, chained together, and there was no escape. He couldn't go on spending endless hours acting a part in which he had lost all belief; he couldn't go on deceiving himself and her. But there was no exit from this narrow stage. There was no curtain to ring down until the run finished in Port Lincoln far ahead.

The wind out of the west swept them along, the rollers that ran out of the west round and round the base of the world rose behind them, towered up, passed under the *Albatros* and went surging on to Australia, to New Zealand, to Cape Horn, to the Cape of Good Hope and back again to the *Albatros*. Grey clouds ran with the wind, hurrying, skurrying, like homing witches. The sun struck palely through. Splatters of icy spray drove aboard from the cold and cruel sea. The albatrosses swooped and swung.

And here he was alone with Magda, with Magda glowing and warm and desirable, and his only reaction was to wonder what banality she would find to inflict on him next, and a wish that Mlle Armande, or any of the others if it came to that, would join them and rescue him.

It was an exasperating, preposterous situation, which could only have happened aboard this loathsome ship.

Magda flicked the end of her cigarette over the side, and turned to him.

He switched on his smile for her. It was a duty. Her eyes, in which he had drowned so recently, were round and emptily thoughtful, like a doll's. The Cupid's bow of her mouth was about to babble more inanities.

"Darling," she said, "isn't it a shame we didn't go back in the other boat?"

"We couldn't, darling. Sorensen wouldn't let us, curse him!" They had been through this so often before.

"I know, but I've been thinking what a shame it is. On that other boat, and then back in England we could have had a lot of fun. But somehow it's not fun any more. Oh, I'm sure we're affinities—because it couldn't have been so swell otherwise—but somehow on this silly old boat things have gone wrong."

Whatever he had been expecting it wasn't this. He was immediately surprised and hurt and aggrieved.

"My sweet, what are you saying?"

"Quite a lot," said Magda. "You're finding out I'm not clever or bright, and you might never have bothered about that if you'd had a lot of smart and brainy people round you to occupy your mind, and there'd just been me to look after the rest of you."

"Why, Magda——?" His astonishment that she should know all this was damnably rude, but he couldn't conceal it.

Magda smiled at him and shook her golden head.

"Oh, yes, Martin, I'm only a beautiful fool who's getting on your nerves. You don't have to tell me, I know—as the song says. All the same I'm not quite a fool where men are concerned. Not quite. I used to be all heaven and earth with knobs on to you back there, but now I'm your darling pain in the neck, darling. Well, it was nice while it lasted, and thanks for the buggy ride."

Martin was utterly taken aback. He had been considering such a scene as this, weighing how it could be handled, turning over lines for himself and her. None of this dialogue was his; it bore no resemblance to anything he had imagined.

"Magda," he heard himself saying lamely, "Magda!"

"You're a very nice boy, and I was fond of you, and we've had grand fun and games." Magda wasn't fumbling; she needed no prompter. "It's just not working out, that's all. Or perhaps I ought to say it has worked out. I don't know who you want or what you want now that we're away from the Hawaiian moonlight and all that stuff, but whatever it is it's not me. I can't give you anything but love, baby—as the song says. If it's something else you want or some other kind of love, well, I just can't oblige."

She didn't look cross or bitter or reproachful: she rested against the rail—a girl who would have caused heads to turn at the Ritz or Claridge's or the Savoy—a girl whom

he had found boring lost in the great Antarctic loneliness. His feelings swung topsy-turvily.

"But—but—you can't do this to me!"

He would have shuddered to have written it; he would have refused to speak it; he said it. And he meant it. That was the trouble with all those clichés; they were so right that they came inevitably to the tongue.

"Oh, can't I?" said Magda, as he had known she would. "Listen, Martin, you may be all you think you are—you may be all the world to your mother—I admit you've been quite a lot to me—but I know something about the gentlemen, if I don't know anything else. For quite a while I've been fading out of your life, and I'm going to make an exit before you, Mr. Great Famous British Author, ring down the curtain on me."

An echo of Sorensen in those last words, and yet in a strange way she was also expressing herself very much in the terms in which he had been thinking. The trouble was she had reversed the rôles and was playing the lead. No wonder he had dried up.

"But, Magda, what have I done?"

A lousy line.

"It's not what you've done. So far so good, as far as what you've done goes. It's what you were planning to do that's got my goat. Fun and games weren't enough. You were going to ditch me, and go get yourself a soul-mate or someone brighter—or a bridge-partner—I wouldn't know. Well, there are other girls aboard this boat. Take your pick. But little Magda's getting out from under, thanks. She won't shame you any more by saying silly things, and she won't give you heaps of fun doing them. So that's that, Martin."

"Magda, you don't know what you're saying——!" Another deplorable line.

"Don't I? Any evening you're wanting me for bridge—or better games—you can always find me, darling, playing patience with Captain Sorensen. Just come and ask for me, but I don't promise I'll be what you get."

She thrust her hands into the pockets of her coat, and walked away with unstudied elegance, making her rough outfit the most perfect creation being worn by ladies down towards the South Pole. She wasn't really angry, and she most certainly wasn't desolate. She remained just Magda.

The great Martin Trevellion had slipped through her fingers, and she didn't give a hoot. Why should she, when she was Magda? Mr. Bramerton had said she would always fall on her lovely feet and was invulnerable.

She had never seemed more desirable, which was saying something, and he had never felt a greater fool. He saw himself standing there grinning after her, foolishly, vacantly, like the clown he was. He didn't like his part at all. Until the fatal day he set foot on the stage of the *Albatros* he had never played the fool, he had never been he who gets slapped.

IV

The Great Southern Ocean continued, and was to be continued in our next. In our next and our next and our next. As a boy, as the Widow Trevellion's son, he had enjoyed serials with their promise of something vastly more exciting to happen in the ensuing instalment, but the worst of the Great Southern Ocean was that nothing exciting would ever happen again, now that his heroine, Magda, had walked out on him.

He had forced Aphrodite to cast him aside because she didn't play stupid bridge, and didn't know the slick easy words and hadn't read the right books. What, in God's name, did books and all those fatuous things matter compared with what Magda had given him and would have had to give if life hadn't been as it was? Intelligence, sensibility, wisdom and the like were all very fine, but set them against Magda and how did they look? Talk about the poor Indian who threw away the pearl richer than all his tribe!

But for that initial fatal moment of decision in mid-Channel he might have been in London with Mercia, and all that Mercia stood for. Admittedly the path with Mercia hadn't been roses all the way, but compared with this it had been bliss. O Mercia, I have been faithful to thee in my fashion.

He was amazed that he had ever imagined the book of Mercia was closed. She was nearer to him at that moment, though thousands of miles away, than she had ever been. She was his world, his truth, his life. All this aboard the *Albatros* was a nightmare, a delirium. He had come, he discovered suddenly, out of the Magda business like a man emerging from a soft and silly dream. Magda had only been

a fatuous shipboard flirtation. He saw that quite clearly, now that he came to think of Mercia again. She was the resurrection and the life. But oh, so far away! so far away! With the cars down below and the jade telephone ringing and ringing.

After all the timeless time I've been away, Mercia, my pale white orchid, are you missing Martin at all? Now when the dusk is settling on London, as it must be, do you think of your Martin? I suppose the gown you are putting on is one I've never seen. Does it flash across your mind that Martin might like it?

"The world's an awful long way away," said Mlle Armande at his elbow.

She had acquired an officer's blue serge coat with gold braid on the shoulders. It was too big for her; she wrapped it across her neat body with a sense of style. And yet she contrived, also, to look small in it and lost, out of her natural element of civilisation, clad in barbarous and enforced masquerade.

Of course, she belonged with Mercia. The pair of them, meeting, would have been completely at home. And Martin, joining them, would have said just, "Why, hullo?"

"Why, hullo?" he said to Mlle Armande, welcoming her. "I was thinking about the world, oddly enough, and people like you."

Noon drew near. Captain Sorensen and his two officers appeared with sextants in their hands, peering up at the sun as the clouds hurried across it, intent on their business of pin-pointing the microscopic *Albatros* on the unimaginable expanse of the waters. They did not even glance at the two passengers; they were a trinity of priests engaged in a sacred rite. The wheeling albatrosses looked down with hard, cold eyes.

Mlle Armande's hair was a silver cap fitted smoothly to her shapely skull. She was small-boned and crisp; she would have made a fine mascot for something swift and modern and streamlined: a racing plane, a world-beating speedboat. She would have been quite wrong as the figurehead for a sailing-ship. Her eyes were wise and quick and knowing as a squirrel's.

"There are so many people like me in our world."

"Are there, mademoiselle?" Martin wondered. He made

a gesture of impatience. "I can't keep on calling you that. Not one Englishman in a million can get the infernal word really right. We always fumble it. Haven't you any other name?"

"How right you are, Martin," said she, and she smiled, showing teeth white and bright, as if she lived on brown, hard nuts. "Of course, I have another name, and you must use it. Stupid of me not to have come to the rescue of the poor Englishman before. But then that might have seemed bold, though I have been calling you by your Christian name for ages. It seems natural to do so."

"I'm glad you have, but why does it seem natural?"

"Because, behind all your fine façade of success and almost genius, you remain a very little boy."

"Me?" said Martin, shocked.

"Oh, yes," said Mlle Armande, "that I should think is the secret of your success. You have never grown up, though you pride yourself you are as old as Methuselah. That is why you see your fellow men and women and the world so clearly. I don't mean here, out of your environment. I mean when you are the little, surprised boy who is writing his school essays which turn into sophisticated plays and films that are worth seeing and airs that are worth hearing. You would never have been you if you had ever been educated or had grown up."

"But, mademoiselle——"

"Poor Englishman! And still I haven't told you! My name is Nicole. Please call me that. It is quite easy to say. Try it!"

"Nicole," said Martin, looking down into her brown eyes, "Nicole. Yes, that's much easier. I like that. It suits you. But that was very interesting—I mean what you were saying. Do you really see me as a little boy?"

"Oh, yes, Martin," said Nicole, "but please don't think I have any maternal instinct, for I haven't. I suppose to any intelligent woman all men are just little boys. That's why the silliest of them make fools of the wisest of us at times. But I don't pretend to be wise. I am merely a working journalist. And talking of that—though this isn't an interview—don't you think there's an idea for a play in the presence of Himmelmann aboard here?"

"I've been trying not to think of him, Nicole."

"I have been trying not to think of him, too, or speak of him either, as we agreed, but for me he is there all the time, down in that cabin beneath our feet, horrible and hideous and perhaps a more luckless Napoleon aboard a more cruel *Bellerophon*."

"At least perfidious Albion hasn't got him in her clutches," Martin said. You could tease Nicole, even about her patriotism.

She made a face at him.

"You dear English," she said. "I have to love you—you are so simple. Do you think there was ever anybody so foolish in the world that he wouldn't prefer to be beaten by the English rather than anyone else? When the English win they always stand their opponent up on his feet again, they prop him up. To me, as a logical woman, that is sheer nonsense. And yet there is always something lovable about nonsense."

"The other night you admitted you hated us."

"Hate? Love?" said Nicole. "What are all these words we use? Surely there should be some hatred in love, and some love in hate. Nothing is so simple that one can say, this is black and this is white. Black shades into white and white into black. To-day I hate you English, to-morrow I love you. It happens all the time and in every way. Nobody and nothing is constant from hour to hour, from moment to moment, if only we faced it."

"No," said Martin, "nobody is constant. Certainly not me."

"Men always say that women have to reduce everything to the personal. It's a lie, of course. All generalities are lies at one time or another. Here we are talking about great matters, nations, principalities and powers, and vague imponderables, and suddenly you reduce us to Magda."

Tone and expression mocked him in the kindest fashion.

"Sorry, but Magda's rather on my mind at the moment."

"Naturally," she said. "That's why I'm glad I'm not a man—or it's one of the reasons. If I were a man in this infinitesimal planet she would be terribly on my mind. It's most unfair to coop up a poor male with a girl who's probably as beautiful as any alive. It's the devil and all."

"Just that," said Martin, "because she's told me we're all washed up."

Nicole looked astounded.

"Now that's news, Martin! What a lovely piece of gossip! I'm most fearfully sorry—I think. But how kind of her and how sweet and wise! Imagine—Magda wise! But she is about men. It's a peasant wisdom. She doesn't have to think. Being Magda, she knows. Oh, I do congratulate her. And you."

"Thanks," said Martin sourly. "Thanks a lot. I don't suppose, living up there on your higher feminine plane, it crosses your mind that I thought the world of Magda and she's the only thing that's kept me sane in this hell-ship?"

"I knew that was the general idea, Martin, but I can't say I ever subscribed to it. I don't expect you'll find you'll go out of your mind now. Worse things can happen to a man than losing Magda. Look at all that's happened to Himmelmann."

"Damn Himmelmann!"

"Oh, yes, I agree, Martin. By all means. But from your point of view he's a nice job of work of some kind. Why don't you hitch your waggon to that poor fallen star? He's not so bright as Venus, but he might be useful."

"Funny that you should use that old tag about stars and waggons, Nicole," said Martin. "I remember drafting an imaginary announcement for *The Times* a while back and I used it, too."

"Not by any chance the announcement of a marriage?"

"Quite the contrary," said Martin, and was pleased to have mystified her. She looked so infernally clever and ageless, so much less beautiful than Magda, so essentially of the big cities for all her fancy-dress of gold-laced serge coat, for all the bleakness of the day.

The ship's people had concluded their office, and Captain Sorensen paused beside them.

"Now I suppose," said Nicole, "you know just where we are?"

Sorensen grinned at her.

"Oh, yes, Nicole," he said.

Nicole?

"The sextant is a wonderful thing," she said.

"I am always knowing just where we are, even without it," Sorensen said.

"By dead reckoning, I suppose?"

"So, Nicole, you are knowing all the sea terms, too? That is goodt."

"If you know where we are you're much wiser than the rest of us," said Nicole. She became guttural, imitating him. "So! That is goodt!"

Captain Sorensen blinked at her.

"This is very cheeky to mock the master of the ship," he chuckled. "I think I must punish you by asking you to drink the glass of Snaps with me. I don't ask you, Mr. Trevellion, because you are always most polite and proper to me. For you there is no such punishment. You get off light, don't you say? Coom now, Nicole. I leave the officers of mine to finish fixing the position of the ship. That is child's play. Coom now, the glass of Snaps."

"You're very kind, captain," said Nicole. "I shall be delighted. Don't forget, Martin, that Himmelmann is a good friend of yours."

"That Himmelmann?" said Sorensen, surprised. "A friendt?"

"Don't give it another thought, captain." Nicole laughed. "See, I can teach you slang, too. I was only teasing Mr. Trevellion. Let's go and drink a toast to the science of navigation."

Martin was furious that the toad had hopped in again. There should have been something shattering to say or do. There wasn't. He thrust his hands into the pockets of his brightly checked jacket and began to pace up and down the swaying deck. Nicole was right. The real drama of the *Albatros* was the lost, burned man buried down there in his cabin. How could one use him? He was the vital passenger, the mystery, the enigma. What a chance it would have been had one sailed in the *Bellerophon*. And might not the *Albatros* be her sister ship of to-day? But apart from all that, since when and why had the toad Sorensen taken to calling Mlle Armande by the happy name of Nicole?

V

The wind had risen, and the old ship creaked and groaned as she drove along. The lamps suspended above the table moved regularly in their gimbals, and at intervals spray rattled sharply on the skylight.

Mr. Bramerton was enjoying their three-handed bridge, and, though it was a pity in a way not to have Magda to look at, her absence was a boon so far as the game went. He liked, too, the gamble of Dummy's hand being an unknown quantity. It added a big element of chance which made the play more adventurous. The pasteboard people were, as usual, being kind to their millionaire friend.

Martin's eyes strayed again to the blank and unrevealing face of the door of the captain's quarters. It was brown as a coffin-lid, though doubtless there was plenty of life behind it.

Mlle Armande exchanged a glance with Mr. Bramerton.

"It was kind of you to teach dear Magda patience," she said.

"I'm sure she'll like the game," he said, "though I'm afraid I was not entirely unselfish in the matter. I happen to like and respect the cards. It hurt me to see them ill-treated."

"I begin to feel we were a bit unkind to fling the poor Lovely to the lion," said Martin.

He scowled at the closed door.

"The captain of a ship has a lonely job," said Mr. Bramerton. "He deserves a fling now and again."

"I wonder is Magda beating him?" asked Mlle Armande.

"I should think she will be quite his match," said Mr. Bramerton. "My deal."

As he shuffled the cards he thought of Harriet, his fifth wife. The Frenchwoman reminded him of her in many ways. She, too, had been intelligent and smart and well-groomed; she, too, had been a writer. Her books were very brilliant—so much so that he had never been able to finish one. To avoid trouble he had lied on that point, and Harriet, of course, had found him out, with most unfortunate results. Harriet regarded her work with awe and reverence, and she had a wonderful command of words. She had told him many things. It was the beginning of the end.

He looked back on his most recent matrimonial disaster

without regrets. He had lived a long time, and he wanted peace and quiet. Harriet couldn't give him that. He should have known it, but then he had never regarded marriage with the same care and attention which he gave to business. It was a side-line with him, a hobby. None of his wives had been really picked with care. He married them absent-mindedly, and after a little while they weren't with him any more, and his lawyers were attending to the financial details.

That was one thing he could say: casual though his marriages had been they did everybody a lot of good and no harm at all. The lawyers had made a small fortune out of them, and the ladies larger ones. It was really a form of charity which a rich man could afford. And it wasn't self-seeking, patronising charity; there was no kudos in it; knighthoods weren't handed out in return for alimony. The recipients weren't pauperised either. They could feel they had earned their pensions.

Of course, everybody didn't look at divorce as he did. Doubtless there were some who called him an old fool behind his back. But Mr. Bramerton was in the happy position of not having to care what people thought about him. He went on his way and enjoyed himself in his own fashion.

Mlle Armande would do very nicely for Martin. He belonged with her; they were two of a kind. With Magda's quite unconscious and inevitable assistance he had been able to do the young people a very good turn.

He rather wished he wasn't so reminded of Harriet all the same. But literary women weren't all Harriets. And young Martin might have been able to compete even with her, being a literary gent himself who would have understood what all her highfalutin stuff was about.

Dear Harriet, she had been much too scintillating for an old stick like him.

He looked at his own hand and across at Dummy's, face down on the table, as uncommunicative as the captain's door. An inner voice urged him to risk it. He called a slam in no-trumps. The pasteboard people knew he had no luck in love. Dummy gave him just what he needed.

"I think we should, perhaps, be playing patience, Martin," said Mlle Armande.

VI

Behind the closed door, behind the plain brown curtain with its backing of brocaded satin, all was decorum. Even the noises of the ship seemed hushed in there, the candles raised their bright and steady spears, and the air seemed warm and soft. The gem of a room defied the immensities of stormy sea and sky out there on the other side of a few inches of wood and steel. Nothing harsh and stark, or crude and rough, could intrude. The place created a new dimension and dwelt in it, outside the *Albatros*, far from her bleak ocean world.

For the occasion Magda had resumed her linen costume, which had been freshly washed and pressed by Brown. It was a tribute to him and to his day-room which Captain Sorensen appreciated. He still wore his uniform and slippers, but he had shaved for the second time that day. It was a tribute to her which Magda appreciated. It showed he knew how a gentleman should behave—and lots of gentlemen who thought a great deal of themselves weren't as fussy as that. She had suffered much from the bristles on Martin's long jaws. That hadn't mattered at the time, but looking back she remembered.

"Do you like this game, Cap?"

"Since it brings you here to be with me it is goodt," said Captain Sorensen, and that was the truth. He didn't regard patience as a game at all, and was paying no attention to it, but Magda, finding it all very difficult and intricate, and anxious to please, was concentrating on it with delicious intensity. As a result she was hardly talking at all, and he could enjoy her beauty at peace, much as he enjoyed his dancing girl or the little jewelled bird.

None of his treasures could give the eye more joy. Sometimes he wasn't too happy about his very modern paintings. There was little that was pretty about them, but since the clever young man had chosen them he knew they were right, though he didn't understand them. Magda was a picture he could appreciate—and understand. If only he could have had her framed and hung her on his wall, what a happy arrangement it would have been!

The childish game wasn't entirely beyond her as bridge had been, but still it wasn't child's play. She was glad to

have escaped from the drabness of the saloon, too, and in fairness she was keeping her host amused. That was a girl's duty.

"The red nine on the black ten," said Sorensen.

"Oh, you lamb—of course! I hadn't noticed it."

But presently the mental effort proved too much.

"I think I'm a bit tired, my sweet," said Magda.

"Then we do stop this moment," the captain agreed with charming alacrity. "Let us to drink, to smoke and to talk. That will be more goodt. My congratulations to you, my so dear Magda. You have played most goodt."

"I could only do my best," said Magda, happy enough that he should have won practically every game. Gentlemen liked to win at cards. And he had been so nice, not suggesting any amusing forfeits as some would have done. He couldn't have treated her more properly if she had been the Queen. It wasn't either that he was like poor Mr. Parsons who'd been drowned—the Mr. Parsons whose only interest in women was what they wore. Captain Sorensen might have wonderful stockings and undies to give away, but they meant nothing to him just for their own sakes.

She gathered up the cards with a sense of relief, and put them away. She felt as if she would be dreaming of red kings and black queens.

"There is still no English gin, but this is the drink that you are liking," he said, and handed her a glass.

"You're telling me, Cap. It's got just what it takes."

"As the doctor ordered, you say?"

"Right again!"

He opened the golden box, and she took another cigarette. They couldn't be bought on board, but they were very plushy. The finest Egyptian, and what was more they had the name of the boat printed on them in gold, just as if it was a millionaire's yacht. He certainly knew how to do things.

"This is the life, darling," she said. "Here's to your very good health."

"And the skin off my nose, yes?"

"And mud in your eye."

Captain Sorensen chortled with delight. "That is very goodt, that new one. The English he's very funny. To say 'mud in your eye'—that should not be to be friendtly, but

it seems he is and, too, he sounds that way. The Mr. Trevellion, he must find you very entertaining."

Magda inhaled, and blew the smoke away, brushing it aside with a hand white as alabaster.

"He'll be out of luck if he does, because I've stopped entertaining him now."

Though his grin remained, Captain Sorensen contrived to give an excellent impersonation of one surprised, astounded.

"But, so dear Magda!" he exclaimed, "what is this that you say to me? You two—such goodt, warm friendts—you are having the lovers' tiff, don't you say?"

Magda laughed and wagged her head from side to side in denial, the candlelight brightening her curls.

"No, Cap, that's not what I say. Lovers' tiffs are fun. There's the kissing after and making up. That won't happen between Martin and I. We've had it. He's a pain in the neck to me, and I'm ditto to him. I can't quite sort it out, but I think it's mostly to do with being stuck all this time in your old boat."

"She is a barque," said Sorensen patiently.

Magda registered contrition. She had no wish to rub her generous host the wrong way.

"I always think of her as a barque, but somehow the other silly word pops to my tongue. I suppose it's not being used to barques. Anyway, that's what's happened."

"So?" he marvelled. "So? It is a very strange happening. Is it goodt? Is it badt?"

Magda laughed.

"I suppose it's good for you, Cap."

Captain Sorensen raised a long finger.

"This you believe or not, Magda, but I am thinking whether it is goodt for you."

She looked startled.

"Good for me? But no man ever thinks of that—not with me."

For the first time she seemed ill-at-ease in the love-nest.

"Perhaps yet you are not finding the best kind of men. The so lovely women—and oh, my gracious, you are that! —very very often don't. It is a thing I have seen many times, here and there about the world. I am a great one for seeing things. There is no greater trouble a woman can have with the men than to be having too much beauty. It is

almost worse than a woman having too much money." Thumb rubbed forefinger. "Yes, me, I will say it is even more badt than that, and that is badt enough, God knows. The woman who is super in money or beauty—for her there's no happiness with the men, not that lasts. Now I becoom gloomy. Let us to take another little drink."

"Another little drink wouldn't do us any harm—as the song says."

"Yes," said Captain Sorensen, "that is an English song. It is goodt and cheerful."

"But if you were so anxious about me, Cap, why didn't you let me go away in that other boat with him?"

"In that liner, the *Andean Star*, there is no goodt for you either. No! With the famous and great Englander there is no goodt for you at all. You blame my fine barque, my *Albatros*, but it is not badt of hers. It would have ended quicker there in that liner and in London than it has here. He is an awfully silly fellow, the Trevellion, though he is so famous and fine. You are awfully silly, too, but that is to be forgiven. You are just a beautiful woman, and I have told you you are too super to find the right man. It makes me sadt, for I am very fond of beautiful and perfect things. And that is why I don't let you go. I could have sent him—I thought of that—I could have sent him off, because he isn't like Mr. Bramerton who is clever and signs an agreement with me. But I didn't, and perhaps now I am sorry, or perhaps I am not. But I knew he didn't matter. I knew, dear Magda, that though he is the great famous writer and actor he is only, don't you say, milk-and-water, a silly fellow. I saw in the end here aboard my barque—not my boat, dear Magda—it would be better that you stay instead of going chasing off with that one."

Captain Sorensen—only he could have dared to do so in that day-room—made a conventionalised gesture of spitting over his elbow.

"Cap," cried Magda, "you're wizard. You're a knock-out."

"Of course." He blew his smoke-rings, sitting back, grinning. "I am the only important man alive."

"You mean—to me?" She breathed the words, awed by his wisdom and authority.

"Oh, no—to me."

Magda put out her cigarette with an impatient gesture, and took another. The rhinoceros obliged.

"You are a tease," she protested. "After being so clever, and all that. I thought you meant you were Mr. Right."

"For you, Magda? Oh, no, I am Mr. Wrong again. I am the most Mr. Wrong of all. See, I speak in goodt slangy English that you can understand."

Magda sat forward, staring at him with huge round eyes, bewildered, fascinated, at a loss. She had never had to think about men before; they simply happened. This one was different. Mamsel Armande had told her something like that; Martin called him a toad. He did look like a toad, splayed out there, leaning forward on the table on long bent arms, goggling. He meant so well, apparently, but he was frightening.

"I understand your English, only I don't understand a word you're saying."

He swept her difficulties away with a wave of his cigar.

"Please not to trouble your so divine head. It is only that I am another of the kind of men that happen to the most beautiful women. Me, or that Englander, or a riding master, or a ski instructor or an Italian count—it is always so. We waste your beauty away, we funny fellows who couldn't perhaps hope to get an ordinary woman."

"My God," said Magda, pressing her hands to her brow, "I wish we'd just kept on playing patience. This is worse than that horrid bridge."

"I am sorry, dear Magda," said Captain Sorensen, "I should know the better. What we are just needing just now is the 'nother little drink that don't do us any harm."

"You've said it," she agreed.

Captain Sorensen had no compunction. At least for alcohol her head was as good as his.

As he put down the decanter there was a sharp rap at the door. He shuffled across and opened it, standing behind the curtain and speaking briefly in Danish.

"My apologies, dear Magda," he said, returning, "but ship's business takes me away for the liddle while. Soon I am back. If you are tired of it here, please to go to bed. If you are happy—then to drink your Snaps in peace and quiet, and smoke. Soon I am again with you."

Whilst he spoke he had gone through to the night-room.

He reappeared wearing oilskins and carrying a pair of rubber over-shoes. It did not occur to Magda that it was odd such things should be produced from that silk-lined bedroom, but her eyes were puzzled again. Had he arranged this interruption? She had known gentlemen who did such things. Surely he hadn't, after being so wizard?

"This I regret," he said, adroitly pulling on the shoes over his slippers, balanced in the doorway so that they should not be used on his priceless carpet, "but with me, my dear Magda, always the ship's business cooms first, yes?"

Captain Sorensen stepped out into the saloon, closing the uncommunicative door behind him. The bridge players were still at their game. The three looked up at him, each very curious. He grinned at them.

"How is the patience going, captain?" asked Nicole, squirrel eyes twinkling.

"Oh, me, Nicole, I am the great man for patience," he said, "but just now it is interrupted by work. To you, Mr. Bramerton, my big congratulations on your so fine pupil."

He passed through and went out into the wild, black night.

On the poop Larsen towered above two of the sailors, beating them into sheepish submission with the white bludgeon of his electric torch. One had a broken nose, and the other streamed with blood from a bitten ear. They had played a part in a sordid and ugly drama in the other world of the *Albatros* which the passengers knew nothing about. All wasn't simple and healthy and clean up there in the bows. Life could be dark and complex even for simple seafarers. Captain Sorensen crouched forward on bowed legs and spat at them through the gloom with the voice of God. They were awed and afraid; they were quenched. In the morning, he said, he would deal further with them. For the rest, they were not to behave like madmen. Larsen would see to it that Jorgen dressed their wounds, though it would have been better if they had killed each other. Fighting for such a cause, fighting at all aboard a ship!

He said some more, briefly, bitterly, and they cringed before the squat little man, and mumbled apologies.

He dismissed them with a curse on the mothers who'd borne them, and they shambled away.

Larsen went with them and Captain Sorensen awaited his

return, brushing long-fingered hands together to cleanse them of unpleasantness.

It was a fine night, to his seaman's eyes. The *Albatros* was making all of nine knots in admirable style. He glanced aloft; he glanced about. All was as it should be. That Larsen was all right. They all were in their way—or they wouldn't have been aboard the *Albatros*. Of course, there were stupid fellows and crazy fellows like those two, but there were stupid and crazy fellows in ordinary jobs ashore. At sea there was every excuse. No one was quite sane at sea. After a life time of it he knew that.

The two passengers, the goodt old Mr. Bramerton and the Englander, joined him.

"Just up for a breath of air," said Mr. Bramerton, "and to satisfy our curiosity."

He was honest and dry, that one.

"It is nodings, but nodings," he told them. "Nodings for the concern of our so great passengers. Two hands, they are hurt a bit in a fall. It is nodings. And so when you have breathed our fine air we don't charge you no more for, then to you I wish the sweet dreams. Now I go to finish my patience."

Larsen had come back, and with a word or two to the mate, he left them, and, though they were only black mounds, he knew that Mr. Bramerton was most amused and the Trevellion furious though he had no cause to be now that Magda wasn't his girl any more. It was amusing. Chess, with Mr. Bramerton, was much the best game of skill. He didn't remember meeting a man more after his own heart.

Down in the saloon the Miss and Nicole were straightening up—packing the cards and scorers away, emptying ash-trays into a bucket.

He paused a moment.

"So," he said, "you get all shipshape for to-morrow? That is goodt. And soon you are to bed?"

"Why, yes, captain," said Nicole. "Quite soon. And you?"

"Very soon, I am thinking," he said, goggling at them both, "for my game of patience is almost over."

"So quickly?"

"So quickly, Nicole."

He took off his rubber shoes, and padded away in his slippers.

"And to you the sweet dreams," he said.

They bade him good night, and before he closed the door he heard them laughing. Well, it was very goodt for nice girls to have fun and be gay.

Magda wasn't in the day-room where the candles burned low. Carrying his shoes, he slip-slopped to the door and opened it. Magda was in the night-room. She lay on the fine linen of the bed which the Miss had turned back for him. She wore only the presents he had given her, and the golden Cupids aimed their arrows at her. The lamp behind its quartz shade filled the place with soft, warm light. No Pompadour, no du Barry, could have graced the jewel-box more superbly.

And the loveliest thing, the thing that filled him with impish joy, was that she had fallen asleep.

Not because of the drinks, not as a trick, but simply because the bed was so soft and comfortable, and she was a healthy, tired girl.

She lay with one arm underneath her head, and the other flung out loosely. Her lashes rested on her cheeks; her curls made cheap tinsel of all the other gold in his golden casket. Her breasts, in his web of brassiere, rose and fell, the little, silly pants caressed her thighs, and her long, slim legs were encased in his sheer stockings.

Of all his treasure there was the richest.

Still holding his rubber shoes, clad in his oilskin, back against the door to check it swinging, he stood there, motionless, barely breathing, gloating. Time went by, and the ship went on. He stood there. This was something Erik Ole Sorensen could appreciate. It was the kind of vision that had haunted his mind when he dreamed in the sun on the shining silver beach of Blavaand. He had come a long way since then, but not until this moment had he seen the vision in flesh and blood.

Life was funny. Just this voyage of all voyages; just this time of all times!

He feasted his round eyes, and Magda slept.

How horribly old and wise and shrewd and self-centred he had become! How life had slipped by when he wasn't looking! Only yesterday it would all have been so simple

and such a miracle. And now——? He sighed, and opening one of the dainty, lacquered chests, put away his overshoes and dropped the lid.

Magda sat up, startled.

"Oh, Cap," she said, "I must have dozed off."

He continued to gloat; he rasped his hands together in enjoyment.

"Ach, yes, my Magda," he said, "you play more than fairly fair. You could not have found a more happy way to show me my little gifts as you promised."

She sat up, admiring herself and his presents.

"They are lovely, aren't they?"

"On you they would be goodt if they were badt old bits and pieces. Since they are so goodt then on you they are made for you like your skin. This I have been knowing, but now I am seeing and you have given me someding I don't forget until the day I die."

"You're wizard," said Magda, happy but sleepy.

"And now," said Captain Sorensen, "I repay you, too, in turn. Now please to slip on your dress and go off to bed —for me, I am tired also. There is much a ship-master has to do."

He stretched long arms.

Magda's eyes grew wider, rounder.

"You mean," she rejoiced. "I don't have to stay? You mean I can go back to my own room?"

"That is just what I am meaning, Magda."

It was really most amusing; it was goodt. Magda bounced in one quick movement off the bed and out of range of the aiming Cupids. She had her costume and her shoes on in the twinkling of an eye. She flung her arms about him and crushed herself to him, pressing her full lips on his. Then she set him free, and gripped his shoulders, holding him at arm's length.

"Oh, Cap," she laughed, "I'm no good at finding the right words, but you're the only man I've ever loved I haven't loathed and despised. Oh, Cap, you're wizard, and that's only the half of it. I may be stupid but I know now what you were talking about earlier on—or I think I do. I know I ought to hate you for turning me down, but I think you're swell and wizard."

She was so truly Magda at that moment that she couldn't

do anything wrong. She didn't kiss him again. She merely shook him by the shoulders with a delight that was keener than any caress. She was gone, and the air chilled and the light dimmed.

Captain Sorensen paused a moment, and then he went back into his day-room. The candles were almost guttering now. He disdained the glasses with the naked ladies for handles and found a heavy tumbler. Into it he poured a three-finger nip of Snaps. The top of the decanter clinked against the glass, for his hand was not iron-steady as usual. Then he took his little silly, jewelled bird from the drawer where she nested in cotton-wool, and wound her up and set her singing. Whilst she pirouetted and chirped, blithe as any lark, he sipped his drink.

"So," he said aloud, as sea-captains often do, "you grow old, Erik Ole Sorensen. You look ahead and you are wise. But then perhaps you are still in your prime, for after all since you were a little boy you have looked ahead and been wise. But it isn't quite so easy to play chess with human pieces, eh? You may find you are a pawn yourself, and then you get surprises, eh?"

He finished his drink, and put out the candles with a snuffer which had once graced Rheims Cathedral. When he had undressed and donned his fine pyjamas, he turned out the lamp and slipped in between the smooth sheets. Magda had left no strange and haunting perfume behind; he didn't even feel the imprint of her body. It was over, that. He thought a little while of ship affairs and other people, and then he fell asleep and no dreams troubled him.

VII

Nicole lay in the narrow bunk below, Brown in the narrow bunk above. No gold, no Cupids in their cabin. The blankets were dark grey, the sheets coarse and harsh. As they enjoyed a last smoke they didn't knock the ash into trays like autumn leaves, but into the round lids of cigarette tins. These rested on small wooden shelves fitted to the sides of their bunks. And yet it was snug in there with the sense of companionship and understanding. Brown felt happy and warm, more so than she had ever felt in the centrally heated apartments in which she used to work.

As so often happened Nicole, though she couldn't even see her, sensed her feeling.

"Have you ever opened a new box of matches, Kathie, and thought how comfortable they looked?"

"I believe I have," said Brown.

"This place is like a match-box."

"In a way."

"It's so frail and small, yet we're as cosy as can be. Just imagine all that horrid water, running down to the Great Ice Barrier with penguins and sea-elephants, I suppose, and then the white cap of snow and ice fitted round the South Pole, and here we are in our match-box. We wouldn't feel nearly as well off in Parisian luxury."

Brown leaned over the side of her bunk briefly and looked down at Nicole.

"Are you a witch or a thought-reader or what? How did you know what I was thinking?"

Nicole knocked the ash from her cigarette.

"Simpleton," she said, "it was too easy. You'd worked in Paris, but I knew you'd never been as happy as you are in the *Albatros*. Absurd though it may seem I've never been either. Put the two together, add the pleasant flavour there is in this match-box of ours, and the dish is cooked."

They spoke in French, because Nicole knew that Brown enjoyed that.

"A match-box is a good idea. It's frail, as, of course, we are compared with what's outside. But Martin had a better comparison for these cabins. He told me long ago that when he first came almost to his senses in the *Albatros* he thought he was in his mother's tea-caddy."

"Yes," Nicole agreed, "that is admirable. But who would expect a Frenchwoman to think of that?"

"For the moment I had forgotten French tea, Nicole."

"You've never tried American?"

"Of course not. I always hoped to get a job with an American family and go home with them."

"You would have enjoyed that. It would have been an experience. But you wouldn't have enjoyed their tea."

"I should like to have seen New York, but I don't suppose I ever shall now."

"Who knows? I should have liked to see New York again myself. It's the only beautiful place that man has built since

Babylon and Athens and Rome and the cathedrals. In fact, I believe it may even be, in the mass, the most beautiful city of all. Shall I ever see it again in view of this chance voyage aboard the *Albatros*? Once more, who knows? Martin, of course, will fly the Atlantic a hundred times. For anybody who has a desire to see America first, he is the answer to a maiden's prayer."

"Idiot!" said Brown.

"Idiot!" said Nicole.

They were silent for a space, thinking about idiots.

"You're crazy," said Nicole.

"The only thing everybody has always known about me is that I've got my head screwed on the right way. That's what all my bosses have said since I first went abroad when I was seventeen. German and French, master and mistress, they knew that. Even Captain Sorensen saw it the first moment. You can ask him."

"But you are still crazy. As for Erik Ole Sorensen—that toad of a man, as your Martin calls him—any woman could fool him."

"I'd hate to try."

"Where did you get all your wisdom from, you funny little English Miss? And yet now you are behaving like one with no sense at all."

"I've only common sense. I know what's good for me. But you, you Nicole,—you are, as the captain would say, a so famous and great person."

"But yes, I am the last to deny it. I give my opinion about Russia, about India, about Britain, about America, and many people are glad to read it. I am syndicated in three hundred and four papers in America alone. People will even pay to listen to me in the rôle of Cassandra, which, with that world back there as it is, I must often play. I could do a lecture tour of this America you wish to see, and be fêted everywhere and make quite a packet of dollars. Oh, yes! But where do you think all this gets me? I am famous, I am a person. And then?"

"And you call me, Kathie Brown, your English Miss, a fool?"

"In a sense, yes."

"Then what about you?"

"Oh, me, I am a great bluff," said Nicole, lighting another

cigarette. "As far as my wisdom goes, I mean. Anybody who knew the right people could write my stuff for me, and be as wrong, and get away with it. I could sit down here, knowing nothing of what has happened in the world for what seems like happy centuries, and write a commentary on the news, and they would print it and love it. Now that I am out of it all I can see that. It should be a great disillusionment, and instead it is a happy revelation. I have been a wearying woman with a career. The *Albatros* has taught me I don't have to be. I am as grateful to her as you are for a different reason. And so you see, I am not a fool about myself. I know what is good for me. In that I am a simpleton, like you. There are worse things to be."

"I see what you mean, and yet for you it's different——"

The door burst open, and Magda was with them. She was a-glow, a-thrill, just as she had been on that first night when she and Martin had left the party on the poop. Her suit, they saw, was uncrushed, her curls nestled to her head; she had obviously emerged unscathed from the love-nest.

Nicole lit a cigarette from her own and passed it across. Magda took it with a nod of thanks, and leant back against the door, happy yet again, triumphant.

"Oh, girls," she said, "I've had a lovely, lovely night. But it was simply too marvellous."

"Did you win?" asked Nicole.

"Oh, the cards," said Magda, "I hate the things. We played for a while, because I felt I had to. He was so wizard. He'd even shaved specially."

"Indeed?" said Nicole, impressed.

"But it was what he did afterwards that gave me the thrill of a lifetime."

"And just what did he do, Magda?"

"Nothing. But simply nothing. When he gave me those undies and stockings I thought the worst. A girl has to, doesn't she? Well, to-night I let him see them on me. Fair's fair, isn't it? And I'm not saying how far I'd have gone in being grateful, but the Cap's a perfect gentleman if ever I met one. He was ever so sweet about how nice they looked on me, and he just let it go at that. Can you imagine?"

"Yes," said Nicole.

"That was nice of him," Brown agreed warmly, because she was very fond of her most beautiful doll.

"Nice? It was wizard! It was a treat! I remember, mamsel, you told me he was the nicest man on the boat——"

"I think I said the most interesting——"

"Whatever it was you were right. And if either of you kids want that chump Martin he's yours, and I wish you joy of him. He's too nice and gentlemanly to know it yet, but the Cap is the kind of man I've been looking for. He thinks he's too old for me, and treats me like a daughter, but has he got charm? Imagine, there I was, only in those pretties he'd given me, and prepared to play ball as a girl should be, and he behaved just as if I was the Queen of England. Now that's what I call a man."

"Me, too," said Nicole.

"I'm glad," said Brown. "In another kind of way he's been fine with me, too."

"Oh, he would be with you," said Magda, without any malicious intent, "but that's another kettle of fish."

"Quite," said Nicole.

"If men only knew!" said Magda. "To be gentle and not always grabbing, but like the knights of old—that's the way to get a girl. And I mean really get her. And yet to look at him you'd never think it."

"You never would," said Nicole.

"Oh, I'm so happy I feel like going away to have a good cry. But I don't think I will. I'm too sleepy. As a matter of fact I fell asleep in there. Wasn't that silly of me? And anyway, I'm not the crying sort. It's bad for you, even when you're happy. Don't forget what I said about Martin, though I'm too fond of you both to want to see you mixed up with a silly, milk-and-water fellow like that, even though he is rather a lamb in his dumb way. But the Cap!—oh, boy! And now I really must be off. Night, night, kids!"

"Night, night, Magda," they chorused.

She was away, and it was as if the sun had set.

"Okay?" asked Nicole.

"Okay," said Brown.

Nicole got up and turned out the pale oil-lamp.

"Good night, Nicole," said Brown. "Poor, dear, silly Magda!"

"Oh, no," said Nicole, slipping back into the creaking, narrow bunk, "we don't have to worry about Magda. Not *les* girls. Only the poor dear men have to do that. We are

lucky, where she's concerned. And as for Magda, she will always be all right. Who wouldn't who's got what she has? Well, it's been an entertaining evening. Good night, Miss."

"Good night, mademoiselle," said Brown.

Their bunks were cosy nests, with the ocean roaring against the side and flooding up over the porthole, so black and cold and empty.

CHAPTER SIX

I

NICOLE and Martin had to cling to the rail for support. The westerly, which had seemed like an invisible railway line down which the ship would run steadily to the terminus, had suddenly broken off, creating the sense of a gap, an unexpected void. In this emptiness the *Albatros* rolled heavily, deadly, numbly, to the processional rollers which, dun and bulging, continued their endless journey. Sometimes it seemed that the tips of her yards would touch the rounded summits. It was a tiresome, wearying motion. Perhaps Mr. Bramerton and Magda had been well-advised to remain in their bunks and doze away the leaden hours.

"I'm very unhappy about this business of Magda and the toad," Martin confessed suddenly.

"Yes?" Nicole invited briefly.

"As you know it's all over between us, but I still don't like to think of a girl like that being messed about by Sorensen."

"I don't like to think of that either," said Nicole. She did not think it necessary to reveal Magda's testimonial to the captain's chivalry. That was a feminine secret.

"The poor Lovely is so completely at his mercy."

"Oh, completely. Particularly, Martin, as she isn't paying her fare. To put it bluntly that places her in a position where she's got to work her passage almost as much as Brown has, though on different terms."

Martin scowled.

"There's the devil of it. There's where he's so cunning and unfair. You remember how he turned down my offer?"

"I do, indeed. But is the offer still open—even now?"

"Good lord, yes, Nicole."

"That's nice of you, Martin."

"Nice? What sort of a swine do you think I am? I'm grateful to her. She can't help being Magda—any more than I can help being that ass, Martin Trevellion. I'd like to make her at least independent financially, and then anything she cared to do would be entirely her own affair."

"True, Martin. And, of course, you wouldn't miss the money."

"Of course not. It would be a pleasure."

Nicole's squirrel eyes were mischievous.

"Conscience-money, Martin?"

He grimaced, wryly.

"I suppose you might call it that, but it would be more tactful not to."

"Consider what the sea does to us! A Frenchwoman becomes tactless."

"Oh, you don't have to be tactful with me, Nicole. Be as tactless as you like, be any way you like, so long as you stay just Nicole."

Her hands went up in mock alarm and consternation.

"Martin," she said, "don't tell me I am marked down as your next victim? Don't say your wayward heart is suddenly yearning towards me."

"I wouldn't blame it if it did."

"But that would never do, dear Martin. Can you imagine anything worse than two typewriters locked in an amorous embrace?"

Martin flung back his head and laughed.

"You do me the power of good, Nicole."

"Perhaps," said Nicole. "And certainly to make a man laugh when the ship is behaving like this—that is something."

"It is," said Martin, looking as if, had they been unobserved, he would have had to put his arm round her and give her a hug—only a friendly gesture of appreciation, of course, but still a hug.

"Be careful, Martin. Brown says I'm a mind-reader."

"Then you should have a very high opinion of yourself."

"Oh, be sure I have, Martin. But see, we've become frivolous and forgotten we were discussing a serious matter."

"Were we?"

"Magda."

"Oh, yes—Magda," Martin said without enthusiasm, for he did not want her intruding in the spirit when even in the flesh she had palled.

"I think that matter could be arranged now if you are willing."

"I doubt it. More unlikely than ever."

"See, here comes the captain."

"I swear he listens in," Martin grumbled, for he didn't want Sorensen intruding either.

"Good morning, captain. Don't you think you could arrange for the wind to blow again. Your ship is not at her best in these conditions."

Sorensen grinned at her and cast a knowing eye at the sky.

"I think very soon we have the fine breeze again. But just now, as you say, it is not goodt. That is why I am here seeking you. This is dull to a lady accustomed to the smooth boulevards—this is not one bit like the Paris. So it seems to me it will be goodt to go seeking you and offer you the *apéritif*. Perhaps even a Pernod on such a day. You, I don't ask you, Mr. Trevellion, because Pernod is a foreign drink, and besides, you are a big, strong man who don't need to be coddled up as you say. And, too——"

"But, captain," Nicole cut in, "Mr. Trevellion has some business he wishes to talk over with you, and——"

"I can do that without a drink. If you offered me a case of Pernod I'd throw it overboard." He set his jaw. He had been pushed around enough by Sorensen. He was determined now to have his own way in the matter of Magda. It would be a victory, if only a small one. He had played the strong man scores of times, and he could play him still, even in this rolling limbo. "Captain," he said grimly, "I insist on paying Magda's passage money."

"But here in the *Albatros* you cannot insist, my dear friendt." The grin widened happily.

"All the same——"

"He is very set upon doing so, captain," said Nicole. "And if you will only consider for a moment I believe you will see that you should not refuse such a reasonable request."

Brown eyes and black spoke together for an instant, and Sorensen assumed a pose of deep thought.

"Well, then," he conceded reluctantly, "if it is your so strong wish, Mr. Trevellion——! Always it is good that my passengers should be made happy. I don't like to be doing what I don't want. That is badt. But if it makes you happier that you pay, then pay you shall, and the money shall be the same as yours. It is goodt?"

Martin felt pleased with himself. He would have looked an awful fool before Nicole if he hadn't gained his point.

"It's a deal," he said. "I thought I could make you see reason."

"Yes, Martin," said Nicole, giving him a congratulatory nod and glance, "you have made our so stubborn captain see reason, indeed."

"So it ends happy," grinned Captain Sorensen. "And so now coom, Nicole, and I give you a taste of Paris to take off your mind."

He took her arm to steady her, and they went away together. Although it was pleasant to feel that for once he had triumphed over Sorensen, Martin could not but be riled to see the pair of them going off like that. Once it had been Magda; now it was Nicole. Why, if he showed an interest in Brown, the toad would hop in there, too! He scowled at the wheeling albatrosses.

Still, there was comfort in the knowledge that Nicole was a woman of the world who could handle Sorensen or anyone else. And his conscience was much easier about Magda.

Down in the day-room the rolling did not seem so noticeable. The place remained a sanctuary from the rigours of the seas. Captain Sorensen seemed particularly happy, which was natural enough for now he could talk Danish to somebody who wasn't one of his crew.

As the Pernod clouded in the glass, Nicole screwed up her nose and gave him a quick, sly wink.

"I have paid handsomely for this drink, Erik," she said. "I have made you a few hundred pounds this morning. They were under your nose, and you hadn't seen them. How very nice it is to have a practical Frenchwoman interested in your welfare."

Captain Sorensen's mouth was a crescent from ear to ear. He raised his glass.

"It is nice and profitable, and very wise," he said.

II

The sun was an orb of brightest gold, the sky a deeper, richer blue than it had ever been on the Equator: a blue which mocked any simile they could think of. The *Albatros*

bowled along, as Mr. Bramerton guessed from memories of his youth, crowding on all sail. And out there, so close that they could feel the cold breath of it on their skins for all the bright sunshine, the iceberg sailed with them. It was emerald green and sheer white; it was an imperishable Gibraltar; yet as they watched they saw it melting away in shimmering cascades which flowed down its slopes and beat the aquamarine sea into crystal fountains. It sat deeply in the ocean, and yet it was more afloat and alive than their tiny ship.

The iceberg was every kind of contradiction and beauty, and it was the first solid shape their eyes had seen since the *Andean Star* had climbed the globe and gone away.

The passengers lined the poop, the real people of the *Albatros* the main deck below.

"Well, well," said Mr. Bramerton, "apart from you, Magda, that's the most lovely thing I've ever seen."

"Oh, Mr. B," said Magda, "you're wizard. But fancy comparing me with something made of ice."

"Forgive me, my dear," he said. "Perhaps for a man of my age I am a little over-excited. I feel as if I had escaped from reality into one of those lovely books about sailing-ships which used to be published, pre-war, at five guineas. I remember Francesca used to buy them, though she would have been sick on the Serpentine."

"Who was Francesca, Mr. B?"

"Let me see, she was my third."

"You mean wife? Oh, you are devastating, you sweet. What was she like?"

"She was a grand girl," said Mr. Bramerton, "but she drank like a fish and had a mania for buying this and that and God knows what. She was very generous to her friends, too, but our marriage wasn't really a success. We weren't truly soul-mates. That's why she divorced me. And now, Magda, stop prying into my private life, and hush, please. I want to hear the iceberg."

"Not another peep out of me," said Magda.

And they could hear the iceberg. It groaned and crackled as it went, and at moments it thundered as whole hills fell away. It was a country, a floating Switzerland, and the *Albatros* was a waggon-load of gaping tourists out for the day.

"The really amazing thing is," said Martin, "that when all that dazzling wonder has melted into nothing, this damned old barge will still be pounding to and fro."

Nicole slipped a friendly hand through his arm.

"Oh, come, Martin, must you always play Hamlet? Surely it's a cheerful thought that our old ship outlasts all that? I generally find the wonders of Nature extremely depressing. Mont Blanc goes on, but what of me who looks at it? I regard the iceberg as warming, just for the same reason it dresses you in sable."

Martin pressed her hand against his ribs.

"You don't hate the *Albatros* as I do."

"Certainly not, and I doubt very much whether you'd be any better off if Captain Sorensen shipped you away to that magic island. There is, as you've already discovered, no future in an iceberg. At least the *Albatros* is flying along with you towards all your bright to-morrows."

"Bless you, Nicole," said Martin. "I know I'm being spoilt and silly, but I can't help that. Damn it, after all these years——! But you're right. In the end she will bring us to this Port Lincoln where life begins again."

"That is a thing to remember, Martin." She pressed his arm and drew her hand away to point. "Oh, see!"

A mass greater than the entire world of the ship had broken away from the berg and crashed into the water. The spray soared up in plumes and drooped, the huge block of ice wallowed and before their eyes was doomed to disintegrate back into the impersonal eternity of the sea.

"Icebergs are sad, like sunsets," Brown decided. She sniffed suddenly. "What a funny smell, when you're looking at icebergs—a smell of smoke, of fire."

In the same instant they were all aware of it. The solemn pageant of the dying kingdom of ice was forgotten; they were back aboard the *Albatros*. And in their world there was all at once busy life and great activity.

Martin swung about, alarmed. It was bound to be something wrong. Nothing was ever right in this accursed ship. Maddeningly, while they were all momentarily paralysed, Sorensen seemed to know just what to do. He went by on his bowed legs, so quickly that he seemed to hop, in his hands a bright axe which he had snatched from the rack. In his wake he towed Larsen and Moller, carrying them along as if

they were attached to him by ropes. He grinned, but grimly; he didn't know there was a passenger, male or female, aboard the *Albatros*.

From the door of the saloon beneath the poop clouds of smoke were pouring out, white and woolly as they belched up, dissipated by the wind into an acrid mist.

"Fire," said Mr. Bramerton out of his boyhood's reading, "fire down below! Oh, dear me! This is a bad business."

"So Himmelmann, perhaps, is after all who he claims to be," said Nicole.

"You mean you think he's done it?" asked Brown, horrified. "Set fire to the *Albatros*?" She couldn't conceive such wickedness.

"Who else?"

"He is certainly an embittered and angry man," said Mr. Bramerton. "I'm sure he's threatened the captain. But could a man who's been through what we went through face fire again?"

"If he was mad," said Brown.

"If he wasn't Himmelmann," said Nicole.

Brown hurried away down into the smoke. The rest of them stood huddled together, a group of foreigners, excluded, powerless.

"But if the ship gets burned up, what happens to us?" asked Magda.

"My dear, nobody has ever known the answer to that," said Mr. Bramerton.

And again, as he had been on the night of the 'plane crash, Martin was staggered by the efficiency of Sorensen's people. The red-headed mate, the block of a second officer, seemed to be everywhere, and down there beneath their feet, he knew, was the toad in his carpet slippers, at the very crux of the situation, grinning, in command. The knowledge riled him, but he couldn't shut it out. Sorensen had snatched the axe in that first split second, and by now he had crashed through the door, and here were the men he inspired and controlled already busy passing buckets of water and flinging great snakes of canvas hose along the deck. The sloths of every day had been electrified. Each one of them seemed to know just what to do, and in the same queer bumbling way as they had worked that night of the storm to save Nicole and the

rest from the sea, they worked now to save the village and all its inhabitants.

He didn't pretend to be a brave man, but he wasn't afraid. Perhaps it was the courage of ignorance, perhaps it was the hateful certainty that Captain Sorensen would not allow his *Albatros* to be destroyed by Himmelmann or Hitler or the devil himself.

"Fire—again, the fire!" said Nicole brokenly. She dropped down on her knees, and all the strength went out of her. She fell forward and lay limp on the planks.

Mr. Bramerton knelt creakily beside her.

"Yes, poor lady," he said, "we've had an awful lot of forgetting to do—and now this."

"I think it's a shame," said Magda. "You might expect to be killed in a 'plane, but not in a silly old boat."

"Nicole! Nicole!" Martin groaned, remembering, imagining.

They were all kneeling about her now. Martin attempted to lift her silver, shining head.

"Leave her," ordered Mr. Bramerton, "she's better as she is."

"I'm better now," said Nicole, brown eyes wavering open. "How silly to faint! I never have in all my life before. I suddenly saw the flames again as they were that night."

"I know," said Mr. Bramerton. "It might have been better had we talked about it, and got it out of our systems."

"Oh, no," Magda protested, "least said about that business the better. It was horrid."

"Silly of me to get into a fuss," said Nicole. "We're aboard the *Albatros*. It will be all right here—it's different." She shook her head, banishing fears. "My apologies. Give me a cigarette, Martin."

He produced his case and handed it round. They lit up, hands unsteady, and stood in a group, while the people of the ship were busy as ants.

"I feel extremely ineffectual," said Mr. Bramerton ruefully.

"Of course," Martin agreed. "You're aboard the *Albatros*."

"Martin, you are funny," said Magda. "As if he didn't know."

"This is really quite a thrill," said Mr. Bramerton, rubbing dry hands together. "Probably at my age I can enjoy it more than you youngsters, because what happens to old Bramerton now has ceased to matter. But if this ship is burnt to the water-line, as I recall the term goes, we shall have to take to the boats, and down here, somewhere between the Cape and Australia, we shouldn't stand a chance. I have always been very bored by the prospect of dying in my bed, or in a nursing-home. This really would be a much more dramatic end. Ruby, if only she could have heard, would have understood."

"Ruby?" said Magda. "What's her number?"

"I didn't marry Ruby."

"But we'd always thought you'd married everyone, Mr. B," laughed Magda. "Or practically everyone."

"Yes," he said, "I have, but not Ruby. And yet, now that we face imminent death in this strange part of the world, her name crops up."

"Perhaps you weren't rich then, or she would have married you?" said Magda.

"No, I certainly wasn't rich, Magda," he said, "but I was a much better catch. I was, I think, about seventeen."

"Why, just imagine!" cried Magda. "Mr. B—seventeen!"

"Just imagine," said Nicole. "Lucky Ruby! Poor Ruby, poor Mr. Bramerton! But isn't this an extraordinary way to be behaving. If the ship's on fire we should be rushing about trying to save our valuables, and—and——"

"You forget, Nicole," said Martin, "that we are still in the *Albatros*. We stand up in the only valuables we possess. Our lives are all we have. And we can't do anything about it until the dear captain tells us to. He is the only man who has stored up treasure here at sea."

Nicole made an eloquent gesture.

"I am still a bit haunted by the fear of fire, or otherwise I should be quite undisturbed. Captain Sorensen is far too fond of his possessions to let his barque be drowned in the ocean. Think of his little singing bird, his golden dancing girl, his antiques and his paintings—not to mention the

rhinoceros cigarette-lighter and so on. No, we may rest assured. All will be well."

"I agree with you," said Mr. Bramerton on a note of mild regret. "We really have no high adventure to face with dogged courage. Ah, well!"

"And yet," said Martin, "the fact remains that we are a million miles from anywhere, and the ship is on fire. Naturally, it would be! If it wasn't, it would have sprung a leak or something."

Mr. Bramerton nodded venerable head, approvingly.

"'Sprung a leak.' Yes, that has the authentic ring. And all this time you've been trying to persuade me, Martin, that you knew nothing about the sea and cared less. Oh, shame, my boy! Shame!"

The smoke had turned black and sluggish; it had lost its vigour. Brown climbed up through it to the poop, her face grimy, charred fragments in her hair.

"Captain Sorensen has sent me to tell you there's nothing to worry about. The fire's as good as out. The one cabin is gutted, but that's all."

"Whose?"

"Himmelmann's. He set it alight with the end of one of the cigarettes he was allowed. Or at least, that's what they think."

"Then he is Himmelmann and not Hitler," said Nicole. "Only Himmelmann, the crazy doctor, would have had the courage to do that, after being in the 'plane."

"But when he'd done it, apparently, he did his best to put it out. He poured water on the mattresses which made all the smoke, he beat them with his hands. His bandages caught fire, and his hands are terrible. If Captain Sorensen hadn't come so quickly with the axe he'd be dead, of course."

"Just like Sorensen to hop in at the wrong moment," said Martin. "Himmelmann, or whoever he is, would be much better dead."

"There I agree with you, Martin," said Nicole, "but I understand our captain more than you do. You remember we were talking of the *Bellerophon*? If you'd been master of that ship, would you have wanted your prisoner to die by his own hand when he was in your charge?"

"Perhaps not," Martin admitted. "But we all know that this Himmelmann is only a poor lunatic."

"Do we?" asked Mr. Bramerton.

"Why, of course we do," Magda said. "Everybody knows that little old Hitler's dead as a door-nail."

"In either case, Nicole," Martin insisted, "wouldn't it have been simpler and more satisfactory if that burned man down there had been allowed to kill himself?"

"Oh, yes," she admitted, "I am with you there."

"So there's your fine and wonderful captain for you," said Martin bitterly, "rushing along with his shining axe to keep a homicidal maniac, whoever he may be, alive."

"He also kept us all alive," Mr. Bramerton pointed out. "If they hadn't got to work like that the ship might have been ablaze from stem to stern by now. We might have been indulging in a mass Vikings' funeral. That would have been quite sensational. Admitting that my point of view is a little peculiar owing to my age and infirmity."

"You are a one, Mr. B," said Magda, "and all the time you're bragging about how old you are, you're really only a schoolboy."

"Bravo, Magda," said Nicole. "How did you think of that?"

Magda was puzzled. "I didn't have to think of it. It's just true."

"Of course," said Mr. Bramerton.

"Of course," agreed Nicole. "Mine was a silly question. I knew you didn't have to think of it."

"Why, there he is!" said Martin.

A hush fell. From beneath the poop, Himmelmann, or whoever he might be, was carried out by two sailors on the splintered door of his cabin. A blanket covered him, but they could guess at his singed and blackened swathings and his hands which had been spared but were charred now. They stood gazing down at him, wondering. Inert and still, the almost forgotten man had burst into their lives again. He had tried to destroy himself and them all. A mad act that proved—what? The longer they talked about it the further they were from an answer, but it was certainly a fruitful topic for gossip in the village.

The iceberg dropped astern, forgotten.

The ship's people coiled the hoses away, and tidied up.

Lunch was served on time. The saloon had been well-aired; the skylight was wide open. A sour smell hung about, however, and the red carpet was still dark with moisture. Where Himmelmann's cabin had been there was a gap which seemed larger than it was, like the cavity left when a tooth is extracted. A sheet of canvas was draped before it as a temporary measure.

Captain Sorensen took his place at the head of the table with his formal bow. He had washed and cleaned up, he looked as usual, he grinned.

"The Doctor Himmelmann," he said, "I have now logged as a dangerous lunatic. He will do no further harm. I shall see to that. He tried to burn oop my *Albatros*. That was badt. It won't to happen any more."

"You mean he's dead, Cap?" asked Magda.

"One might hope so," said Nicole.

"There are worse things than death," said Captain Sorensen. Jorgen appeared with a tray and served glasses of Snaps all round. They were not the captain's own glasses, but plain small tubs such as were used when the passengers bought drinks, on credit, for themselves. "See," he said, "this is the exception that proves rules. These, as we say in slang, are on the house. I do wish you to drink to the fact that we are not now a ship afire down here in these so badt waters. And then I would ask that there should be no more talk about that chap. He isn't goodt; he is badt. No more—I order. Then here is mud in your eye, as you say, eh, my dear Magda?"

"Mud in your eye, Cap," said Magda. "You're positively wizard."

"Wizard," echoed Nicole.

"In a way," said Mr. Bramerton, "it's a great disappointment not to perish in an open boat. On the other hand, even with one foot in the grave, life remains great fun. Astonishing fortune, captain."

"He is new to me," said Captain Sorensen. "I like him, for always I am having astonishing fortune. Yes, he's goodt. I tell you now someding to cheer you all. I am thinking that this weather will hold, and sooner than you think, perhaps, we are coming to that Port Lincoln which was once so very far away."

Everyone exclaimed, everyone asked when.

"I am not saying," he said. "That would not be goodt. If I start to boast and brag, then perhaps we spoil our luck. But I am thinking we are getting along pretty goodt, and taken on the all-aroundt it has been a better than most passages. Yes, it has been goodt." He raised his glass to the ladies, to Mr. Bramerton and Martin, to the chunk of his second officer. "So now you must all start to think of the fine things you are to say to the newspapers that the *Albatros* is so goodt a ship for the passengers."

He grinned at them. He had given them something to think about other than that Himmelmann.

III

Even Martin had to admit that the *Albatros* was doing her best to justify Sorensen's optimistic announcement. She seemed to be flying now as steadily, as effortlessly, as her namesakes in the sky. Day and night, night and day, without pause or check, she ate up the miles. Her bows cleaved urgently through the grey-green seas, her sails were firmly full. The deck was canted at a sharp but steady angle, and her people moved about as if they dwelt on a hillside. To starboard the waters raced level with the rail, sometimes leaping over in silver sheets. The wind harped in the rigging, playing stirring music.

Martin, eyes weary with weeks of empty ocean, could imagine Australia there ahead, just below the horizon. Oh, to stand on the firm earth again; to have a city's pavements beneath the feet; to lie full length in a steaming bath instead of sluicing with salt-water and a pannikin of fresh; to have books and theatres and films; to enjoy privacy and freedom and choice as one of millions; to see tall buildings and wear decent clothes; to be civilised and back in one's own environment! The sea is His and He made it. So far as Martin was concerned He could also keep it. An ungracious thought, perhaps, but from the bottom of his heart.

The only compensation really was that he had found Nicole at last. He regretted now the weeks in which Magda had dazzled him so that he had been blind to the only woman in this ark who was his natural complement. They might have been made for each other, the pair of them. Everything was

right about her: her mind, her looks, her soul, her age, her knowledge of the world and life. They saw things with the same eyes, and laughed at the same jokes. She spoke his language and belonged to his world.

No wonder Mercia had receded again, or rather that her dim image had faded into the immediate and vital figure of Nicole. Nicole and Mercia had much in common whilst remaining as the poles apart. It was natural for a man who had loved Mercia to love Nicole. It had been a sinful waste of time for him to have dallied so long and foolishly with Magda. Only aboard the *Albatros* would he have spared more than an admiring and ironical glance for the glorious dressmaker's dummy. He was ashamed of himself.

He took a puff at his cigarette. It had gone out in the wind, and put a bitter taste in his mouth. He flung it over the side. An albatross swooped down to inspect even that speck of whiteness in the hungry sea, saw that it was inedible, and curved smoothly away again, eyes sharp and seeking.

Where was Nicole? He wished she would join him and share this sensation of hurrying, hurrying, back to the haunts of men. Surely the toad had not waylaid her again? He had been doing far too much of that since he had discovered that Martin was interested. Martin had ventured a mild protest—one couldn't dictate to Nicole and there was no use trying to hide one's feelings from her.

"But, Martin," she said, "you don't like the captain, and so you can't understand. I like him very much and find him excellent company. Besides, you must admit that room of his is a great temptation to a sybarite. You should be the last to deny it."

IV

Beneath Martin's feet, only the thickness of the planks away, Captain Sorensen was remarking to Nicole, "This news of ours will be a great surprise to your friendt."

"Martin? Poor Martin! If it comes to that it will be a great surprise to everyone."

"Not, I think, to Mr. Bramerton. Though I beat him, he plays very good chess. He is not so very young any more, and that is the main reason why I have made a lot of money out of betting with him."

"I am glad of that," said Nicole, "for he has money to burn, and why should he do that when we can use it? All the same, he plays his own most amusing game very well, my dear. And so do I. We are three of a kind, as they say at poker."

"Yes, my silver-top," said Captain Sorensen, and saying it considered her with eyes which thought black and popping were suddenly deep and rich and warm.

Nicole put her cigarette down in one of the golden leaves, and taking his long-fingered hands in hers held them. She looked very young, like a student in a wig for a ball of *mardi gras*.

"You are a rascal and a bad man, but you are honest," she said. "I do not think I could have loved a man who wasn't all three."

Captain Sorensen chuckled.

"You are very right there," he said. "I don't deny I am all you say, and I don't have to, because see what it has brought me. I make a lot of bullying noises, and I am master of my ship and I stand no nonsense from this one or that, but I am a very simple soul really."

"Do you have to tell me this?"

"I don't have to tell you anything. That's what's so fine. Only these things are nice to say when one has been very alone and suddenly, so surprisingly, finds oneself beloved."

"And they are nice to hear," said Nicole. She was smoking again, but her left hand still held his.

"Then I will tell you another thing which isn't necessary. In the night now I wake up in my splendid bed and I ask me, 'Erik,' I say, 'how is it that this wonderful thing has happened to an old fellow like you, who hasn't deserved it? And how is it that it should be so practical and wise and sensible into the bargain?—because you know very well, Erik, that, too, appeals to you.'"

She laughed with him.

"And I shall match that, Erik. I wake up in my narrow little bunk, with nothing splendid about it and grey sheets and blankets——"

"But——"

"You know I don't want fine linen aboard the *Albatros*—yet. It would spoil everything. I wake up, then, on my

wooden shelf, and I say to myself, 'Nicole, how does it happen that you who have been everywhere, and seen everything, should find your heart's desire in this small world into which you were flung willy-nilly? And, unless Providence or whatever it is had intervened, would you ever have thought your heart's desire would be a villainous old ship-master with a very black record, or that the sanctuary you were seeking was a four-masted barque? No, Nicole,' I say in my narrow bunk, 'and yet so it is and so it is, for which thank the good God.'"

Captain Sorensen's crescent mouth had lost its sharp lines; he was very at home there with Nicole. It wasn't only his feet that wore comfortable slippers.

"Now this is a most pleasant way for people of our age to be talking, my dearest Nicole. It makes me feel young again. As if I was that boy who used to sit and dream on the silver sand at Blavaand. The sand there shines like your hair."

"We shall go some day."

"Yes," he said, "that will be good. And the boys and girls who are playing there will see only a middle-aged couple and never know. I think, perhaps, to fall in love at our time is a very good idea. There isn't the ecstasy there would have been, but there is certainty and confidence and richness. One can go on gambling on little things, and that is fun, but one doesn't have to gamble on love. See how eloquent you make me, silver-top."

"Yes, my dear frog," said Nicole.

"Frog? Is that a compliment? Do I look like a frog to you?" The idea surprised him, naturally, though he had been standing in front of a mirror and shaving every morning for all those years.

Nicole's face lit in fond amusement.

"But frogs are pretty dear creatures," she said, dropping into English. "The British they have a nursery rhyme: 'A frog, he would a-wooing go, heigh-ho, said Rowley.' Perhaps that is what I was thinking of. When I was small I had a governess who might have been Brown's sister—but, of course, there is only one Kathie Brown."

"'A frog, he would a-wooing go,'" Captain Sorensen repeated, and he also spoke English. "Yes, that is goodt.

I don't know why but I like him. Then I am your frog, yes, for I have certainly a-wooing went."

"And look where it's landed you," said Nicole.

"And, please, to look," said Captain Sorensen.

They sat in silence, holding hands over the corner of the table of silken wood, and the little singing bird, silent, watched them. They looked into each other's eyes like a boy and girl at Blavaand. The ship surged on, alive and vibrant beneath them, their ship.

"And supposing Magda had been lucky enough to land this fine catch, the master of the *Albatros*?" he said, reverting to Danish. "What a poor wretched old maid my Nicole would have become then—on a shelf worse than the comfortable bunks we provide for passengers. Were you afraid of that, silver-top?"

"Oh, no," she said, "I have also been playing a bit of a game, you know. I threw her into your arms. She'd never have known what a fine fellow you were if I hadn't told her."

"So?"

"Of course. If Magda hadn't been aboard I'd have had to have invented her, or had her sent across from the *Andean Star*."

"So? This is very odd."

"Not at all. Your sweetheart is French, my dear captain. She knows a lot about this kind of business. Magda is everything I'm not—magnificently so. If you can resist her, then I have nothing to fear, because of the other kind of woman I am as good as you'll find. See how cunning I have been, Erik? I got my only possible rival out of the way before we begin. Magda is everything a wife fears in a husband of your age. How unwise I would have been not to use her when she was to hand."

Captain Sorensen was very pleased with this. He rocked from side to side, laughing at himself, laughing with her.

"You are a baggage, and cunning as a fox! You are shrewd as a squirrel. There—I have it! If I must be a frog, then you are a squirrel."

"Agreed, Erik. That is fair. And remember that squirrels are provident creatures who look ahead. You are my hoard, stored in this hollow tree, against my winter."

"You didn't mind, then, when I gave her those presents?"

"I think you must have done so because I willed it."

"So?" he said. "So?" He considered. "But I don't think you know that I was allowed a special fashion parade there in my night-room."

"Be sure I knew that. We are dealing with Magda—dear Magda—who is simple and honest as daylight. Oh, yes, Erik, that was a very important test, my frog. When Magda came to us—oh, so irresistible!—and told us what had happened, I knew you were worth loving, and that I could follow my heart. I am not a young bit of a girl who can afford to take chances. This is all very important to me. You see what a good friend Magda was to me when she modelled for you in your expensive scanties. I wasn't a bit jealous that you hadn't tried to lure me into your love-nest."

Captain Sorensen released her hands and stood up. He looked down at her comically, quizzically, ruefully, and in adoration.

"I don't know that this is so goodt after all," he said in English. "I am thinking perhaps, Mademoiselle Squirrel, that you are a bit too clever for poor Erik Ole Sorensen. Always I am being very smart, and I grin a lot at what I see, but now I am beginning to think perhaps I make a poor match. I am now pouring us a drink, and thinking it all over. Perhaps I call it off. Perhaps I let the Trevellion have you after all. This I see now might be a poor match with one that is so up to all the moves."

Nicole made his gesture with finger and thumb.

"Not so poor as you fear, Captain Sorensen," she said. "Perhaps I am leading you a bit up the garden path, as the English say in the so goodt slang. Perhaps I bring you a better dot than you imagine. Perhaps I am only pulling at your leg when I say I am only a working journalist who can't afford to pay more than thirty shillings a day."

Captain Sorensen poured two Pernods.

"And perhaps that you are not doing, Mademoiselle Armande. Perhaps I would have given a passage for noding at all, if you had been more smart."

"It didn't matter, dear captain," she said. "I would have paid you five pounds a day if it hadn't been for the fun of haggling. I knew even then it would all be in the family."

"So? Even then?"

"Even then."

"Since we are talking at these home-truths just now," he said, "this I am telling to you: even then when that *Andean Star* was there I wouldn't have let you to go if you are offering to me ten thousand golden English sovereigns."

"And I wouldn't have gone if you tried to bribe me with the same."

He handed her the glass.

"It is very strange," he mused, "but oh! great goodtness it is goodt!"

V

Martin felt he was giving a worthy performance. Irving himself could not have helped going a bit white about the gills at such a moment, but at least his hand holding the goblet of champagne was quite steady and he joined in the babel of excitement and congratulation with which the announcement had been greeted.

"Wizard!"

"Perfect!"

"Upon my soul!"

"Why, that's swell," said Martin.

They were gathered, by special invitation, in the day-room. The *Albatros* still hurried along with them, but there was little sense of that in there. It was merely a most fitting room in which to announce an engagement. Jorgen flitted about, shining and delighted. Everyone was shining and delighted.

"Since I couldn't make the grade I'm glad you have, my sweet. It's simply priceless." Magda put down her glass, and went to Nicole and kissed her.

"Nicole!" said Brown. Tears were bright on her cheeks. She, too, kissed Nicole, glowing with happiness.

"May I, my dear?" said Mr. Bramerton, and brushed her cheek with his lips. He shook Captain Sorensen's hand. "And as for you, my dear chap," he said, "if you think I am as astounded as I am pretending, then you are a greater fool than I take you to be."

"Nicole," said Captain Sorensen, "to you now I appeal. Have not I been saying that to our Mr. Bramerton this would come as no great news?"

"You have."

"But it is goodt?"

"But it is very goodt," Mr. Bramerton agreed.

"Of course it's wizard," said Magda, "but I'm not so clever as the rest of you. You could knock me down with a feather."

"And you, dear Mr. Trevellion?"

Martin had shaken Nicole's hand warmly, as a man too young to indulge in the familiarity of kissing, and now was wringing the toad's dry paw. Yes, it was a worthy performance.

"I was never more surprised in my life," he admitted, with admirable candour, "and you could knock me down with the same feather. Still, it is a pleasant change for something happy to happen board the *Albatros*."

It was well said. There was no hint of how sick he felt inside, or how he hated them all and the hateful ship. O Mercia! O Mercia!—in our world I wasn't a figure of scorn and ridicule. You were a whip of scorpions at moments, but only in private. In public, at least, you saw to it that I remained the Martin Trevellion. You wouldn't have had any truck with me otherwise. He summoned up her face, but it evaded him. Somehow, damnably, he could only see Nicole who was engaged to be married to the toad. It was a fantastic, nightmare position.

"And now I am showing you, Nicole, what a goodt and understanding husband you are to get," grinned Captain Sorensen. "All these so fine, great passengers are dying to cry out and exclaim their wonder that you are for me. But while I am here—the captain—it isn't goodt that they should do so, no! But the party must be yours, as that other belonged to the Miss, here. So now I go, I leave you." He opened a drawer inlaid with mother-of-pearl and took out his sextant. "I am, don't you say?—the soul of tact. Now I go out to take a star-sight and see to the ship, and I don't even wait to put on a greatcoat. It's goodt?"

"Very, darling," said Nicole.

"Please to drink and be merry and say all that you will at Nicole's party," he said, and putting on his cap, sextant tucked under his arm, he slip-slopped out. His grin had never been wider.

"What a funny thing to do," said Magda.

"You see what I mean?" Nicole asked the others.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Bramerton.

"He's the kindest man," said Brown.

"He'll probably be listening in up on the poop to hear me say I think you've gone out of your mind, Nicole."

"Dear Martin! I should be furious with you if you thought otherwise. Though I've warned you all along" —she grimaced at him—"that my affections were that way inclined."

"Like hell you did!" said Martin.

"But certainly," she insisted. "Martin thought because I could use a typewriter, too, we were made for each other. So, I believe, did you, Mr. Bramerton?"

He looked very cunning.

"In view of what's happened," he said, "I've no statement to make to the press, on or off the record, but I will say I chanced to have formed a certain attachment for our captain, and it seemed to me an admirable idea that he should have a rival, rather than be granted an easy walk-over. I paid you the compliment, Martin, of thinking you were about the finest rival to be found. If he could out-pace you he'd have nothing to worry about in the future."

He looked so benign and kindly that even Martin had to join in the laugh.

"You and I, Mr. Bramerton," said Nicole, "were approaching the same problem from different angles."

"Yes," he nodded, "I know."

"Of course, my dears," said Nicole, "in some ways I agree this seems an astonishing match, but I assure you it was made by a Frenchwoman with her eyes open. We regard marriage seriously in France."

"Much too seriously," said Mr. Bramerton. "That's why you're such an immoral people, and the staidest man has his mistress."

"Ooo, Mr. B," cried Magda, "naughty! naughty!"

"But very true, Magda," he said. "I have always regarded marriage lightly, and I haven't had a mistress for centuries."

"You didn't need to, you wicked man."

"The fact remains that I was always lawfully married in the eyes of God and the State. Can a citizen do more?"

"We are getting from the particular, meaning me, to the general, meaning you," said Nicole. "I still claim that my seemingly surprising marriage is perfectly sound and sane. I am weary of the world out there—that big, noisy, angry, sorry, muddled world of which I've seen far too much. The time has come for me to retire or take the veil."

"You mean go into a convent? I think you're wise to grab the Cap, instead."

"It certainly won't be quite the same thing," said Nicole, and she looked merrily impudent, because she knew more about Erik Ole Sorensen than any of them. "Since I am not taking the veil, it behoves me to marry and settle down in one place and be done with dragging my weary bones about the face of the globe. But I should go crazy if my home were a villa dumped down on the Riviera, or an apartment in New York, or anywhere else where I should have to stay put. The answer, you must see, is to marry a sailing-ship, and have a permanent home and be as self-contained as a snail. At a snail's pace my home and I and my life will go about the world, and yet always remain in the same place. We shall escape from the cities, and yet the cities will be there and they will come to us at times. But we shall always remain in our snail's shell, very snug and warm, in haven and at home, no matter what port we may be in or what ocean. Poof, I need a drink after that! Jorgen!"

The steward hurried to serve the radiant lady who would be mistress of the *Albatros* and continue adventuring aboard her when he had put up his plate in Copenhagen and was building a fine practice.

"Well, that beats the band," said Magda. "I wish I could dope things out like that."

"You don't have to, Magda, silly, and you know it," said Nicole. "But I just wanted to prove to you—and in a way to myself—that I'm acting in a most self-seeking and far-sighted fashion."

A buzz of agreement rose from them. Martin joined in it.

"Also for some inexplicable reason, I love the man, my dears," said Nicole.

"Ah, *l'amour! l'amour!*" sighed Aphrodite, the peerless, the incomparable.

VI

Breakfast over, they sat on smoking. There was nothing better to do, for the rain beating on the skylight warned that the deck would be no place for them that morning. They were trying to tease Nicole into getting Captain Sorensen to name a possible date for their arrival at Port Lincoln.

She wouldn't do it.

"Not me," she said. "For a little while yet I have to play him with care. He has taken the bait, but he will not be safely hooked until the registrar there in South Australia hands me my marriage certificate with a few words of kindly advice about the sanctity of marriage even when the vows are not made in a church. Then I shall have him safely in my creel, and there'll be no escape for him. If I handle him wrongly now, he might be gone with one flick of his tail. Eh, Erik?"

Captain Sorensen regarded her with fond and popping eyes. It was goodt to joke with her.

"See now," he said, "the kind of wicked woman a simple sailor is taken in by. She boasts before him of that which she is about. Ach, what a miserable, poor man am I." He didn't look it. He laid a long forefinger against his button of nose and winked. "And even if she is to be so silly as to be asking me, then I don't tell neither. He is my superstition. Now it is Captain Sorensen who is more anxious to get to Port Lincoln there than any of you. He is not chancing to say out loud his hopes of when, in case those so sharp albatrosses hear and tell the Westerly and he gets in a huff at such impudence, and packs up, as you say. No, from me I don't tell you noding. It would not be goodt. But——"

He was interrupted by the entry of the steward. In a yellow oilskin Jorgen looked more like a canary than ever, and a canary in a rare flutter of agitation and dismay. The rain streamed from him and glittered in his fair hair. He made no apology for his intrusion and stood on no formalities: his news was too sensational for that.

"Himmelmann—Himmelmann has gone, captain!"

"What do you say?"

"Himmelmann's gone—vanished!"

Captain Sorensen was already on his feet. He tossed down his napkin.

"Excuse me," he said. "That Himmelmann——!" He

hopped away to his cabin, and was back in oilskins and his rubber over-boots whilst they were still raising their eyebrows and looking at each other in bewilderment. And in his right hand was a revolver.

With Jorgen flapping behind him he passed through the saloon and out on to the deck. The door, open for a moment, was an oblong of cold silver.

Though only Brown and Nicole had understood the brief exchanges, the name of Himmelmann and Jorgen's manner had informed them all that something serious had happened.

"Has he—passed over?" asked Magda.

"But how can he have vanished?" Nicole asked Brown. "That's incredible."

"Jorgen couldn't make a mistake."

"He said 'vanished'?"

"This is most extraordinary," said Mr. Bramerton.

"A man in his state locked in a cabin with a barred port-hole can't escape," said Martin.

"But he has," said Magda, "and now he's got away I'll bet you he goes and sets the boat on fire again."

"Don't!" said Nicole.

Their eyes went to the place where Himmelmann's cabin had been. For the moment the carpenter had been content to board it off. There was no door from which that grotesque, unhuman figure could appear, but then, of course, wherever he was he wouldn't be in there. But he might be anywhere else, in hiding, up to any devilry. He might come lurching in from the rain-swept deck, a white and sodden mass.

"Perhaps he'll get hold of one of those big axes and murder us all," said Magda.

They laughed at such a preposterous fancy, but their laughter was brief and gusty and they were not amused.

"Erik has his gun," Nicole said. "This time he will be ruthless. Where the safety of his ship is concerned he won't take half measures."

"He has to find him first," Martin pointed out.

"We're rather overlooking the fact that if he did get out it's on the cards he was as mad as a hatter and simply jumped overboard," said Mr. Bramerton.

"Oh, I hope he has," said Brown. "Poor devil!"

They sat there, watching the doors, hearing the hammer of the rain, feeling the ship drive on with them, waiting. This

theory and that was discussed, but, as was always the way with Himmelmann, there could be no certainty. He remained the figure of mystery, shrouded, muffled away.

The saloon was cold and grey. The tobacco in their cigarettes was damp. Brown moved about clearing the table, piling the dishes, but they noticed that she did not attempt to take them away. True, that was Jorgen's job, but in other circumstances she would have done it readily enough for him, if he were busy with the captain. When Brown was scared, truly something was radically wrong aboard the *Albatros*.

The round clock in its brass case ticked the minutes away —sixty of them, one hundred and twenty. Still they sat there, waiting. Once Martin got up and opened the door. There was nothing to be seen save the long sweep of the main deck and figures moving about, dim in the curtains of the rain. The pitted sea rose and fell. Despite the downpour the wind still held. Millions of raindrops marched and counter-marched, danced and died. He slammed the door. As usual, the passengers were excluded from that alien world.

They fidgeted, they smoked, they talked, and they waited.

The door began to open from outside. They watched it, tense, afraid; they greeted Captain Sorensen with a sigh of relief and welcome.

He paused to take off his dripping oilskins and overshoes and fling them out to Jorgen, who went away. The revolver was no longer in his hand, and his grin was reassuring. Slippered and himself again, he lit a cigar and walked to the head of the table.

"To you I must apologise now," he said. "I had forgotten that you might be troubled and oopset. Other ship business arose, and I am dealing with that while I am still in my deck clothes. He's very wet out there. The Himmelmann, you need not fret about him any more."

"He's dead?" asked Nicole.

"He is dead, yes! It was all quite simple, only that Jorgen isn't making it plain at first. He is forgetting last night to lock the door. Yesterday that Himmelmann saw for the first time how badt his injuries were. He has gone over the side in the dark. It is best so—it is goodt riddance to badt rubbish. And there is the end of him."

"And now we shall never know!" said Mr. Bramerton.

"Your minds set at rest on that point also," said Captain Sorensen. "Even with his badly burned hands he is managing to leave a note. I have it here." He tapped his pocket. "It is in German, yes. 'I am the Herr Doktor Himmelmann and no one else.' I do not think a man writes a lie just then when he is going to his death. I think then he is writing what is true. So that is the end of him. It would have been more goodt if he had been dying in that 'plane back there. A great nuisance he has been, the Himmelmann."

"He's certainly better dead," said Mr. Bramerton.

"The ship is cleaner now," said Nicole. "I do not forget that he tried to destroy the *Albatros*."

"Jorgen will be here soon. You had better buy yourselves some drinks. I am thinking you need them. So! The Himmelmann is over. Yes, it is goodt."

He padded away, and Jorgen entering at that moment, Mr. Bramerton beckoned the steward.

"We will give him a brief wake and forget him," said Mr. Bramerton.

But they knew they wouldn't. They were thinking at the moment of that strange mummy of a man washing about in the bleak antarctic seas, finding no peace, restless even in his grave, twice burned and frozen now.

VII

Captain Sorensen, hands clasped behind his back, stood studying one of the pictures he did not understand. It seemed he was trying to make up his mind what he really thought of it, and was about to ask Nicole's opinion. She did not intrude on him, but sat patiently.

He turned about, head thrust out, hands still linked behind him.

"It is the first time that there is something in my ship that baffles me."

He hadn't seen the picture straight before his eyes; his brows creased.

"Himmelmann?"

"That one. There was no note."

"Of course not, Erik."

He blinked at her, pleased, but made no comment.

"And he did vanish. I have searched every corner of the ship, but he is not aboard. Of that I am certain."

"Surely the explanation is the one you have given. He saw the horror he had become; because he couldn't go on living he took the opportunity to make an end of himself. Jorgen admits he left the door unlocked all night?"

"He is full of regrets and apologies, even while hinting it was all for the best——"

"And he is right!"

"Only," said Captain Sorensen, "he didn't."

"He didn't?" She stared at him.

"No," he said, with finality. "I was astir early this morning, before dawn. I had a sense of something amiss. You know—or will know—how it is with master of a ship. He develops a sixth sense. I went along to have a look at Himmelmann's cabin. All was quiet, and the door was locked. I tried it, and made sure of that. My key was back here. I didn't bother further. This morning neither the lock nor the port had been forced. I think that rather than try to explain the inexplicable, Jorgen took the blame on himself, hoping that I would be glad enough to be rid of the tiresome Himmelmann, anyway."

"It is possible," Nicole said doubtfully.

"Yes, but not quite convincing. It is a riddle, and I don't like riddles for which there are no answers, when they are posed here in the *Albatros*. There are only two keys. There was no reason for Jorgen to let him out and then relock the door. My key was safe and nobody touched it. I tell you, this thing will worry me all the days I live. Even that Himmelmann could not dissolve into thin air."

He moved restlessly up and down the cabin. It hurt Nicole to see him so. He was so conscientious where his ship was concerned, so omnipotent and omniscient. This mystery struck at his professional pride which was deep and real. She had to help him. There must be some solution. She searched for it.

Suddenly she snapped her fingers.

"If I give you peace of mind, Erik, will you promise me one favour?"

"The favour is promised whether you give me peace of mind or not, Nicole."

"It is all very simple, Erik. Jorgen did leave the door

open, probably with the key on the outside. Remembering later last night what he had done, he went back in the darkness and turned the lock. The door would be closed. He did not think to look into the black cabin, where, of course, he assumed Himmelmann was still in his drugged sleep. Since the harm was done this morning, and he did not know you had been to the place, he did not complicate matters by going into this further detail. It was his fault, and he simply took the blame."

Captain Sorensen slapped fist into palm in a gesture of relief.

"My silver-top, you are clever," he said. "That is the explanation. It is simple, as you say, but it had to be thought of. I am a lucky man to have found a wife who can solve the hardest riddles."

"Yes, you are lucky, my frog. But about your promise?"

"Haven't I told you it is granted first? But what would you?"

"I want you to forget all about this wretched Himmelmann. I would not have our *Albatros* haunted by a tiresome ghost. Whether he was Himmelmann or that other doesn't matter any more. He is dead and done with. If I really believed him to be Hitler I should still prefer that the world should imagine that he died there in Berlin. Let him cause no more trouble. He is in hell, anyway, with his friends and his historic forebears and examples. Let him be forgotten."

Captain Sorensen weighed the matter, and gave a little sigh.

"It is a pity," he said, "but a promise is a promise, and it shall be as you desire. Once I built a great deal on this Himmelmann and he seemed important. Now that I have you, none of these little chessmen matter."

"You could never have been certain, Erik."

Captain Sorensen looked very sly.

"There was a way," he said, "but I shall never tell you now. If he lied to me on one point——! No matter. He is buried at sea and far astern. We shall never mention him again."

Although in love, he remained Erik Ole Sorensen. It was amusing. He saw her fighting a bitter battle against feminine curiosity which was almost overwhelming. And while he

watched she won it, and he was shrewd enough to know she did so for his sake.

"You are very worth loving, my Nicole," he said, and stepping over to her kissed the puzzled frown from her brow.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

A SENSE of dissolution and unrest stirred in the *Albatros*. Though Captain Sorensen still kept his council, and his officers faithfully took their cue from him, rumours and guesses were in the air. The wind remained favourable and steady. If the luck held, in a matter of days now, so far as the passengers were concerned, this little life within a life would be over. There was still no sight of land, and the albatrosses remained their only companions, but they were not deceived by these things. Very soon they would be ashore again, back in their own worlds.

No bridge now. Nicole had better occupation in the evenings. Martin had gone early to his bunk. He was bored and fidgety at the same time. The Himmelmann idea had not fructified; nothing would until he had escaped from his prison. But the monotony of the sea brought one boon: sleep came easily. For two pins he would have stayed abed until they berthed, drowsing the hours away.

Magda and Mr. Bramerton were alone in the saloon. Master and pupil had abandoned a game of patience. As Magda said card games didn't really seem to get you anywhere. Mr. Bramerton had agreed readily, for he shared Captain Sorensen's opinion of the patience for which, once upon a time, he had been such an enthusiastic salesman. He was content to sit and smoke his cigar and enjoy the beautiful picture on the other side of the table. He lit a cigarette for Magda. There was no golden rhinoceros now, and the cigarette hadn't the ship's name printed on it. Still Magda had cause enough to be content. It wasn't often a girl could claim the undivided and openly admiring attention of a millionaire. She looked serene; she basked.

"You don't see anything much wrong with me, Mr. B, do you?"

"No, far from it, Magda. My name by the way is Louis. You must call me Louis, though I shall be sorry to stop being your 'Mr. B.'"

"I suppose I had a nerve calling you that, Louis, but

'Bramerton' was such a mouthful. I mean talking to you all the time as you have to in this boat."

"It was nice to be 'Mr. B'—but Louis is nice and short, too."

"It's a swell name," said Magda. "It suits you, though I don't think I'd have thought of it myself because it's too kind of romantic. Come to that I suppose you must be a romantic sort—I mean with all those wives."

"There's that." He smiled.

"And they show you must know an awful lot about women."

Mr. Bramerton's grey eyes twinkled.

"You think so, Magda?"

"Of course!"

"Then I do."

Magda leaned forward, very earnest and lovely.

"Then for Pete's sake, Louis," she said, and a lot of gentlemen who had admired Magda in the past would have been surprised at the puzzled, helpless, almost frightened note in her voice, "tell me what's wrong with me?"

Mr. Bramerton was touched. Here was beauty in distress—such beauty, and such silly, lovable distress.

"My dear Magda—and I don't mean that just as a conventional form of address—there is absolutely nothing wrong with you. You are a peach; you are, I think, the most beautiful girl I've ever seen, and I've seen plenty."

Magda should have been thrilled by the millionaire's compliment. She wasn't. She brushed it aside with a slicing movement of her lovely hand.

"Oh, heck," she said, "thanks and all that, but I didn't want a line from you, Mr. B—Louis. I'm no good at thinking or saying what I mean, but being on this old boat all these ages and being away from everything and everyone with only the birds and the fish and you and the rest has done something to me. I can't tell you what it is, I don't know myself." She moved uneasily, impatiently.

Mr. Bramerton showed concern.

"Magda, child," he said, "please don't start worrying your divine head about all that kind of nonsense. Just go on being you. That's good enough."

"No," said Magda, "I know you want to be kind, but I've got to get this out of my system while I can, and you're

the only person in the world, I think, I could do it to. I want to try and find out where the hell I stand."

"On a perfect pair of legs," said Mr. Bramerton, hoping to make her laugh, not enjoying Magda trying to compete with life by thinking.

"It's no good, Louis," she said. "You can't put me off just now by being cheeky. You see, I don't want to go back to all that stuff—modelling in other people's clothes, and being photographed pretending to be what I'm not, and being mussed about."

"You were at the top of the tree in your own job, Magda."

"Oh, yeah? A monkey-puzzle tree, like we had in our garden in Clapham when I was a kid. Only the monkeys weren't puzzled."

"I say!" Mr. Bramerton was quite impressed.

"There you are," she sighed. "Even you, and I know you like me a lot, are surprised I can say anything that makes even as much sense as that."

"Oh, no," he protested, but he couldn't make it quite convincing. "All I mean is, Magda, that you've so much already that you don't need to be able to say anything at all."

"You prefer me dumb, eh?—like the rest of 'em."

"I prefer you—let it go at that."

"You're very sweet," she said, warming to him. "You see, Louis, though I didn't know it at the time, that 'plane crash and this boat—well, I dunno. Anyway, I've been thinking in my own way. That nice young fellow, our Mr. Parsons, he's dead; that Himmelmann guy, he's dead. I might have been dead, too. Supposing I'd been killed that night, what the devil would I have had from life?—seeing that everyone agrees I'm absolutely tops in looks and a good kid to take out and all that. I'm getting no place, and though I can take it and don't bleat about it much, it gives me a pain, particularly these times. Nobody seems to want me, or not for long. Martin never did really, and Sorensen didn't at all. Yet any other girl like me could have had her pick. It's the very devil!" She ran her hand through her curls which clustered back into place.

"Dear Magda!" said Mr. Bramerton, feasting his eyes on her.

"Mind, I must say the Cap was awfully nice to me. No-

body could have been nicer, and I thought he was like a knight of old to let me get away with it after I'd shown him myself in the undies he gave me. He talked to me very nicely, too. He pulled that 'Mr. Right' stuff, but I must admit he didn't try to kid me he was Mr. Right."

"I'm sure he didn't, as I know Captain Sorensen."

"Yet there you are, he's gone all out for mamsel. Nothing against her, of course, and I think they'll suit each other quite well, both being foreigners and all that, but still she did get him, and I didn't. It's hard for an old man like you to understand a girl like me and how things go with her. I mean how fed up you get with man after man making passes at you, and all they want is what they call the Body Beautiful, and if they can't get it they buzz off, and if they can they buzz off, too, in the end."

"Perhaps it's still that question of Mr. Right, Magda."

"Okay! Okay! But where do I find him? Don't forget I'll have to get back on the job the day the trip's over."

"You've found him," said Mr. Bramerton gravely.

"Like hell," she said, and spoke quite bitterly.

"Magda, what do you think of me?"

"I think you're swell, Louis. I think you're the nicest man I've met. You're not like most old men. You treat me like a daughter you are proud of, but you're not just a sugar-daddy who wants to bounce his baby on his knee and see how pretty she looks in her bath. There aren't many really clean old men like you about. I find they generally get dirtier as their hair gets whiter. Particularly if they've lots of dough. They're the worst. Yet you've lots of dough."

"Oh, lots and lots—whole bakeries of it."

"I think it must have been all those wives," Magda decided, with the air of a wise child. "That must be it. You got into enough trouble with them, without having to go running after girls like me."

"I got into plenty of trouble!—plenty!" Mr. Bramerton said, "but I was never tempted to run after a girl like you because I've never met one before."

Magda made mocking eyes at him.

"Ooo, Louis," she cried, "if I didn't know you I'd think after all you were a wolf at heart."

"You don't seem very scared."

"You're no wolf, Mr. B—you're an old honey. I've told you, and I meant it."

"I realised that, and it was quite the nicest tribute I've ever had paid me, because it was so ingenuous and sincere."

"Doesn't 'ingenuous' mean dopey?" asked Magda doubtfully.

"Not in the sense I use it, by any means. It was extremely soothing for one who has been divorced five times to be called a 'clean old man.'"

"I think they were pigs—all those wives! Or crazy!"

"That's nice to hear, too," said Mr. Bramerton. "But they were neither pigs nor crazy. Perhaps, what with one thing and another, they were never married to me at all."

"I don't get it," Magda admitted.

"No matter," he said. "Are you fond of a gamble, Magda?"

The sudden switch puzzled her. "Don't you start talking cleverly to me, Louis," she pleaded. "One thing I've always liked about you is you're so nice and simple. Martin used to nearly drive me cuckoo when he got going. Poetry, all that stuff. The things I was! It used to make my head go round and nearly send me to sleep at the same time. And I could have screamed, only I'm too polite. But if you mean just, am I fond of a gamble?—like that!—why, you bet. I love being taken to the races or a spot of roulette. But not cards, or anything you have to use your head about."

"I was going to suggest a gamble to you where you wouldn't have to use your head at all. Only your heart! I have a hunch that would be all right for this gamble. Oddly enough, my heart is involved, too."

Again Magda ran her hand through her curls, and again they crisped back, and she registered appeal and protest.

"Didn't I ask you, Mr. B—Louis—not to get all complicated and tie me up in knots? Talk simply, like you always do. I haven't got the brains for the other, honest! What's all this about hearts?"

"Never mind yours," said Mr. Bramerton, "that will look after itself. But I'll be quite simple about mine: it's not the heart it used to be. It may pump on for another ten, twenty years; it may stop at this moment."

In the course of a long and successful life Mr. Bramerton

had been often flattered to high heaven and always made much of, but he'd never had a lovelier tribute paid to him than the consternation and pity in Magda's face. Had a red rose blanched into snowy whiteness at his news it could not have been more moving.

"You mean your ticker's really on the bum?" breathed Magda. "Oh, Mr. B! Mr. B! What a rotten shame!"

Mr. Bramerton jerked out his handkerchief and blew his nose. The night was chilly, and he was far from young. He made quite a job of blowing his nose. His face was almost hidden for a matter of seconds.

Magda waited on best behaviour for the poor dear old man to finish. She couldn't get over the thought that he might die at any moment, and go the way of Mr. Parsons and Himmelmann.

"Ah, that's better," he said. "Excuse me. Now let's forget about my heart. There's something else I want to tell you. I've always been a collector of beautiful things, objects of art. I like to have them about me. They're the only things that money can buy. I like them of all kinds and descriptions. You mightn't guess it, but I appreciate lovely gowns and jewels and furs, among other things, and I like to see them displayed to full advantage, just as I like my pictures properly framed and housed and my rubies properly set. No one disputes that you are a beautiful thing. You yourself admit it. Your job is to show off beautiful things to advantage. I am not talking cleverly now, you see, but quite simply. You follow, Magda?"

Magda had listened with rapt attention. Now she drew back a little, gazing at him round-eyed, and she put up her right hand, palm outwards, with the beginning of a movement to thrust something back.

"I—I think so," she said unhappily. "You—you want me to—to model for you?"

Mr. Bramerton nodded to himself. She wasn't, as she would have phrased it, putting on an act. The glorious simpleton was completely sincere, completely herself. He rubbed his hands; he gloated on her, like Captain Sorensen on his little dancing girl, though Sorensen's girl was only inches high and only made of gold.

"Why, yes," he said, "that is one way of expressing a part of it—perhaps the most important part. Any other

duties would, of course, be entirely up to you. I think you would find the terms most satisfactory."

Magda looked into his eyes in a strange, dazed way, and was silent longer than he had ever known her to be.

"It's a wonderful offer," she said, very slowly, at last. "Wonderful. It's kind of knocked me out. And yet—life's a rum go—in a silly sort of way I almost wish you hadn't put it up to me. I think about you sillily, I suppose. I can't explain it. It's awfully good of you, but I wasn't spilling you a hard-luck story in the hope——"

"You numskull!" laughed Mr. Bramerton.

"I really wasn't. Oh, Mr. B, I don't want to seem ungrateful for such a wonderful chance, and truly I'm not. And I know, too, you'd be very, very good to me. It's only that—oh, hell, why wasn't I born really dumb? It would have been much better than never being able to say what you mean."

"Much simpler, anyway," said Mr. Bramerton, "but this is one of the times when you only have to use a word of one syllable."

"I'm going to use it, don't worry, but this is also one of the times when I'd like to be able to be as clever as Martin and talk like someone in one of his plays and find all the big words to say all the things you feel deep down."

"God forbid that you should," said Mr. Bramerton piously.

"It's awful to be all tied up inside and not be able to get it out. I mean, of course, I'm going to say Yes! because I think the world of you apart from you being a millionaire, only there are other things I'd like to be able to explain to you, too. Not just ordinary things. Oh, hell!"

Mr. Bramerton studied her with eyes which were old and wise and surprisingly bright. Still it wasn't an act. Magda couldn't have done it.

"My very dear, my best treasure," he said, "there's nothing you have to explain."

"Oh, there is! there is! About not being just out for some of your dough and all that. The worst of it is you'd believe me—unlike any other gentleman—and here I can't say it."

"I tell you, you don't have to," said Mr. Bramerton. "When a gentleman's asking a lady to marry him he doesn't want any explanations. He only wants to hear her say Yes!"

His meaning reached Magda's brain.

"Marry?" she said, and the word was hardly a sound at all. Her mouth became a stretched bow.

"But, of course, Magda," said Mr. Bramerton, assuming his most shocked and outraged air. He could not have looked more amazed if he had been asked to resign the chairmanship of the board. "You didn't think I was contemplating, after all these years, breaking the habit of a lifetime. I was proposing marriage, my dear. I never do less, and this is my last and final proposal."

Magda sat swaying a little, her mouth still a stretched bow, her eyes immense and silvered over with tears.

"Ooo, yes, yes, yes!" she gasped, and fainted.

Mr. Bramerton blew his nose again and more heartily now. He had never seen anybody faint gracefully before. But for Magda to faint at that moment was the most natural thing in the world, and so she could not bungle it. She slipped back into her chair, and lay there pale and still, a smile on her waxen face, the Sleeping Beauty.

Mr. Bramerton did not rush for water, or hurry to revive her with his kiss. He might be charming, but he knew he was no prince. She was quite comfortable, and needed a breathing space. He was most happy about his morning's work.

But a lady passenger could not faint aboard his *Albatros* without Captain Sorensen's sensitive toad-sense being informed. He hopped immediately out of his quarters.

"It's quite all right, Sorensen," said Mr. Bramerton, and his smile was almost as wide as the captain's, "I've just asked Magda to marry me."

Sorensen's legs grew more bowed and then forced him into the air in an odd little hop of joy. He rasped his hands together.

"Coom now, this is goodt!" he chuckled. "This is the second-best good news that ever I am hearing. Although I don't say nodings, my so dear friendt, I begin to think you might leave it until it is too late and so then you lose this splendid rose-pink pearl I fish oop out of the sea for you. Ach, this is goodt! goodt! And you will be the happy ones, that I know. Yes, it is the very job for her. Now I am gay."

He gave another little jubilant hop.

"As you know, Sorensen, with my heart it's highly unlikely I'll take up over-much of her life, which is a pity in one way. But an old man mustn't grumble, and I don't. Indeed, I count myself very fortunate."

"As so you should."

"Another man in my shoes and feeling as I do about Magda might have thought of adoption——"

"Ach, no!" Sorensen protested. "That would be dull, conventional, not you at all. That would be badt."

Mr. Bramerton nodded.

"Besides," he said, "just imagine how mad all the other five wives will be, to learn there's a late-comer to scoop the millions in the jackpot when I finally throw in my hand. It would almost be worth doing for the fun of that alone. I must make a will immediately, for one never knows. You and Nicole shall be witnesses."

"It is an honour," said Sorensen, "and all very goodt amusement."

They grinned together, they chuckled. Though in appearance so unlike they made a fine pair of gnomes there in the brown cave of the saloon with the Sleeping Beauty.

"And now," added Captain Sorensen, "I am thinking you will wish to pay the passage money of your so beautiful Magda, my dear friendt."

II

"Honest, kids, and you know, at least, I'm honest, I was never more surprised in my life. And no dirt about it, that's what I like. I've always thought, though I had to pretend, that all that sex stuff was dirty. It's messy. The gentlemen expect it, and seem to think it's fun, but I have a kind of notion that half the time they're only pleased because they feel they're getting the better of us girls. I mean—oh, I don't know what I'm trying to say, but it's always been a crashing bore to me. And what a crashing bore! Mind, I've always done my best to make it seem otherwise, but gosh! If you knew what it means to me not to have to go through the routine any more. I feel a hundred years younger."

"A hundred years younger you'd still be you," said Nicole.

"Isn't it odd?" said Brown. "To look at Magda you'd think——"

"I know," said Magda. "Everyone always has, both girls and gentlemen. But I've given you the low-down on me, and believe me I'm not holding out on you. And it's funny in a way that the dumb blonde—and I'm not boasting now, dears—should get the millionaire."

"Oh, no," said Nicole, "it isn't funny. It's perfectly right."

"It isn't, you know, and no kidding. I wouldn't kid either of you. But here I am with Louis, going out to everything in the world and you two stick around in the old boat."

"This old boat," said Nicole, "can go anywhere and do everything. It's much more comfortable than if Mr. Bramerton bought you a million-dollar yacht. Wait till he does, and you'll understand. We don't envy you, Magda; we're okay."

"Then that's okay," said Magda, radiant. "And I'm ever so glad."

III

Thin, excited voices mingling with the thin, excited pipings of gulls, and a stamping of feet on the deck above, awoke Martin from heavy, liverish sleep.

He found he was lying in his bunk in vest and pants, and the way his pillow was crunched up beneath his head and the dryness of his mouth told him there had been a party. Of course!—the luncheon at which the crowning absurdity of Magda's engagement had been announced, with dear old Mr. Bramerton paying for wine and looking remarkably like a boy playing at the school theatricals in something by Pinero, and darling Magda too delicious for words. He recalled, vaguely, making a speech and proposing a toast. Usually, one had qualms in the circumstances, but none came to him. He must have given another good performance. Of course, with Mr. Bramerton and Magda it had been easy, for he admired them both, dispassionately. Nicole had been much more difficult.

The *Albatros* was still bowling along as she had been when he decided to take a brief siesta. He looked at his wrist-watch. Good lord, it was almost six. He had been out for

three hours. And meanwhile something was happening which had put the whole ship in a fuss. He had lived long enough in her to know that.

His head would have liked to remain on the crumpled pillow, but he lifted it, and swung himself down from his upper bunk. The shock of landing on his feet was rather jarring. The cabin was the same old brown box, and, as he splashed his face with the water which remained in the zinc basin from his after-lunch sluice, he remembered—Oh, centuries ago!—that he had thought it was like Mum's tea-caddy. Mum? The Mater! Drying on the rough, brown towel he moved across to the porthole, noticing in passing that Mr. Bramerton's bunk was empty. He hadn't needed a siesta. He was a game old lad, and Martin wasn't at all so sure, on second thoughts, that he was quite the doddering old fool he had seemed when the news had first broken. With what he recognised as one of the first flashes of his normal insight which he had had since he abandoned the Channel packet he looked into Mr. Bramerton's mind, and what he saw there startled him.

"Why the cunning and subtle ancient," he thought. "Write it on the tablets that all millionaires are not fools."

He was pleased to be reasoning things out so lucidly, despite his head and his mouth, but when he had finished drying his face and flung the towel aside, he knew why it was. Out there, through the brass ring of the porthole, where long ago on that first day and ever since he had been baffled by the enigmatic and ruthless sea, he saw, smudged in a pale yellow line along the swinging horizon, the land, the shore, a frontier to the oceans, Australia, the world. He was saved! He had escaped!

"'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,'" he said aloud, "'look upon this little child.'"

He had meant it, of course, blasphemously, bitterly, but hearing his own words lingering in the tea-caddy he was shaken anew. They sounded shamefully like a prayer.

Meanwhile, there was all that excitement above, and he was missing it. Typical, to the end, of the way things went when an albatross about your neck was hung.

He pulled on his clothes, gave his teeth a brush, and hurried out through the empty saloon, up the ladder and to the poop. They were all there, the old familiar faces. They

pointed out Australia to him with great glee and excitement, as though they were so many Captain Cooks discovering the beastly country, whilst he was a yokel who thought the world ended at the next village.

Captain Sorensen was smoking a cigar. He grinned at Martin.

"So!" he said. "There is the desire of your heart, and I am thinking you have been asleep while we all have been very happy and gay to see it there. Never mind, Mr. Trevellion, better late than never, as the slang goes. To-morrow I am thinking you can shake the dust of the *Albatros* off your feet, and to-morrow there will be dust on our decks that blows from the interior desert. That is a thing I am always thinking is very strange—dust of the desert on a four-masted barque. It will be there to-morrow."

"Thank God!" said Martin.

As Captain Sorensen was speaking a very strange thing happened. The friendly wind had been with them, and the ship danced along over healthy waves which were mere hillocks compared with those they had left behind, blue and healthy and lively little chaps who ran towards those golden beaches over there, not grey pilgrims whose journey led them round and round and round the cold base of the globe. But now all at once the wind died and the small waves dwindled; the sea lost its vigorous blue and became sleepy; the white galleons of cloud dissolved into a kind of heat haze in the upper sky, and the weather-stained wings of the *Albatros* drooped and lost their power. A hush gripped the world and the ship. On the far-off shore a single long white plume of smoke, which had been dispersed before, raised up a steady column.

In the quiet they could hear the indefatigable cook, to whom the outside world meant nothing, rattling pans in his galley amidships.

"Erik," said Nicole, "remind me of this if ever I am so foolish as to mock your superstitions as those of an old shell-back."

"Never mock me, Nicole," he said, "for I am always right when I follow my own course. This one, this Mr. Trevellion, for some reason I can't understand has always disturbed my compass. But for him I should never have made that foolish boast. And so now here we are stuck,

within sight of our berth almost, and it is Erik Ole Sorensen who would rather be tied oop than anyone." His joke dampened his anger. "See, it's goodt," he said, grinning at Nicole, "I can't be really so cross a man when I can make the fine, great joke in English. Tied-oop, you see?"

"Frog," she said in Danish.

"Silver-top," he answered, and then to the others in English, "Yes, here again we are stuck, like the fly on the wall-paper. You must to occupy yourselves. Coom, Nicole."

He left the dead poop where there was nothing to be done, and took Nicole with him.

"Oh, Martin," said Magda, "I've just remembered. My fare. You've agreed to pay it to the Cap."

"Forget it, Magda." He was blushing, but perhaps under his tan it didn't show.

"Oh, no," said Magda, "that's not right at all. Louis, darling, dear Martin persuaded me to let him pay for me, so that I wasn't the Cap's plaything. As I wasn't, and shan't have to be anyone else's again, do you think, Louis, that poor Martin——"

"It was nice of you, son," said Mr. Bramerton, "and I know just how you felt. But of course, I shall be paying Magda's passage money."

"Naturally, sir," Martin agreed.

"But this is amusing, very," said Mr. Bramerton. "We play chess, you know, Martin—the captain and I. He was a move ahead of me there, but I think I shall show him something just this once. You are quite willing to pay Magda's fare?"

"Of course."

"And had agreed to a long time ago?"

"I can't remember when, but ages——!"

"That is goodt!" mocked Mr. Bramerton happily.

The ship was trapped in a sea the colour of pale honey. Seldom as he had agreed with the toad Martin had an uneasy idea that if only he had slept an hour or so longer the spell might not have been broken. He shrugged. Until he really went down the gangway such things would keep on happening.

The sun began to drop towards the west where the land faded into a shimmer. The sails drooped, flat and tired. The

albatrosses had stayed behind to keep their lonely vigil. Small, familiar white gulls beat about. Up on the fo'c'sle-head some of the crew began a concert, singing their sad and haunting songs which drifted aft faintly through the pellucid air. They clapped their hands and tapped bare feet and laughed at each other. Martin had an idea that their ditty was not as innocent as it sounded. But despite Captain Sorensen's forecasts back in the North Atlantic he hadn't learnt enough Danish to know, nor had he written that goodt book about his voyage in the *Albatros*. He never would.

The ship's people, up by the great, spoked wheel which rested from its spinning this way and that, were stirred into sudden interest. Martin looked in the direction to which their fingers pointed. A thick smudge of black smoke had appeared in the sky. Jens Larsen, the long red-headed mate, raised himself from his perch on the stern-rail and marched along the poop and went down the ladder. The approaching ship set a new tremor of excitement in the stagnation. The sailors stopped their song, and went to lean along the rail, bare arms folded. Everyone watched the steamer taking shape beneath her canopy of drifting black lace.

Martin recalled, with a pang of regret, the *Andean Star*. So many weary leagues of foam between, and not another ship till now.

Sorensen and Nicole, followed by Larsen, appeared. Nicole was speaking to her lover in Danish, and, with the land over there, Martin wasn't a playwright or an actor if he didn't know she was prompting the toad.

Captain Sorensen paused by his passengers.

"So," he said, "this is perhaps goodt. I have been fearing that here so near the end we might be delayed days, weeks, who knows how long. That wouldn't be goodt. It would be badt. But see now here comes a steamer that passes by us within the biscuit-throw. I can send a signal to her and she will wireless for a tug to come and take us in. The trouble is"—he wagged his head and looked doubtful—"the trouble is that like most goodt things that costs money." Thumb caressed finger. "I am as eager as all to get to that Port Lincoln, but I am an old-fashioned seafarer who spends his life in sail. A man like me, he must learn to be patient."

He breathed a croaking sigh, and goggled enquiringly at

Mr. Bramerton, confident that he was going to win another game, mocking his friend and victim, who understood the fun of it.

Mr. Bramerton put up his hands in surrender.

"All right, you old pirate, it's on me, as usual. I don't mind, because I owe quite a lot to the *Albatros*. It's agreed then—and signed between us as two business-men: I pay for the tug and you agree to call her?"

"Ach, yes," said Sorensen, looking vaguely uneasy.

"What an admirable wife you are taking to your bosom, captain! I'll bet even you would never have thought of that one all by yourself."

"Oh, Mr. Bramerton," said Nicole, "the lovely things you say! They'll really have to make you an ambassador."

Mr. Bramerton bowed acknowledgments. "It is a little late for that, I'm afraid, Nicole, and no government would ever have been so sensible. Oh, by the way—" he paused as if the point had just struck him and smiled dryly at Captain Sorensen—"there is a detail we have both overlooked, my dear captain. Yesterday you asked me about Magda's fare, and naturally I agreed to pay it. I find Martin here had at the time contracted to do so. I shall naturally have to pay him out in the circumstances, and must deduct the amount from whatever the charter may be for the tug. Checkmate?"

Captain Sorensen enjoyed that.

"Checkmate!" he agreed, avoiding Nicole's eye, but Mr. Bramerton made his stiff bow to her and said graciously, "Mademoiselle."

The steamer came surging towards them, and the ship's people, at the captain's orders, busied themselves with bunting.

IV

Night was occupying the saloon, though outside the sky still burned with the sunset. They had laid the table together, and Jorgen paused before lighting the hanging lamps.

"Stewardess, please," he said in English, "this I think is the last time we do this dinner-setting together."

"Why, steward," said Brown in her Danish, which was quite fluent now, "what about to-morrow?"

"To-morrow I don't know. To-morrow we are tied up at Port Lincoln."

"But there will still be a dinner-table to set."

"Not by me, Miss."

"You mean you'll want to be ashore?"

"I am meaning that, yes, and more. I don't like the *Albatros* nowadays. I have had enough. I go. I take a steamer back to Denmark, and there start to my practice. This day our captain has told me he will give me my—my discharge there in Port Lincoln. I don't think he is sorry. He has not forgotten about Doctor Himmelmann."

Brown went to him in the shadowy place and put her hand on his arm.

"Jorgen," she said, "I'm sorry, so sorry. It won't be nearly as much fun working with anyone else. You've been so right in every way."

"And you," said Jorgen. He lapsed into Danish. "It is good to be praised by you for doing a job that wasn't really my job. I value your opinion. I have a great respect for it. You are not afraid of strange work either."

Brown had to smile at the manner in which, when he used his native tongue to her, he spoke in a stilted way, almost as if he thought in English and then translated it back for her. She supposed it was the result of their long barterings to and fro.

"If you've had enough," she said, "I don't blame you. All the same, I don't think the captain bears any malice about the Himmelmann business. He has forgotten that."

Jorgen drew closer to her in the deepening dark and his voice dropped to a whisper.

"But I have not forgotten Himmelmann. I must tell someone, and you are quiet and wise and don't go gossiping. I have a secret for you, and I must take this chance to tell you. You will never say a word of this?"

"Of course not," said Brown. "I shouldn't have to tell you so."

"You don't, or I should never have said anything. Stewardess Brown, I killed Himmelmann."

"You what?"

"It was my most unpleasant duty—the only bad duty I have had to do in the *Albatros*."

"You mean Captain Sorensen ordered you to?"

"Oh, no. He has never had any idea. The order came from myself, from my conscience."

"You believed he was Hitler?"

"That was one thing. I didn't know. He might have been. I am a true Dane. Hitler killed my father and my mother and my brother. If by the remotest chance that man was Hitler, he had to die."

"You couldn't be sure—any more than anyone else."

"I wasn't. Another duty fell on me. You never saw his face, his body—the horror of him. That I couldn't inflict on any other eyes. If he were Himmelman, then I, as a young and modern and reasoning medical man, could not allow an insane monster like that to live. It would have been a crime against the wretched fellow, and against the world. I shall never believe that monsters, whether made by Nature or cruel accident, should have to go on breathing. Even the Kaffirs are wiser than that. And so to me, young and all as I am, fell the duty. He never knew. A small overdose—just enough—and he went to his rest. Hitler or Himmelmann, it had to be. It wasn't a nice case for me, so early in my career, but I know I did well."

"Yes," said Brown after a moment, "yes, Jorgen, you did well."

"It wasn't nice," said Jorgen. "I dumped him overboard in the middle watch when there was none about. Unfortunately, from force of habit, I turned the key again in his door. That was a mistake, but it wasn't noticed. I wanted you to know because in all our other works we have been together. But I shall be glad, as you may guess, to be gone now from this ship and start in my practice amongst the children and the sick and the old. In Denmark life is kinder than it is at sea. And now I light the lamps."

The match flared bright and warm as a torch in the still, black box. He looked young and golden, a mere lad. And in spite of everything he was still very like a gay and spry and innocent canary.

V

In the morning the tug would come to take them in and it would be over.

A full moon rode high, turning the waters to silver, tracing ebony patterns of the rigging on the snow-bright deck. The smell of the land, indefinable, unmistakable, tantalising, haunted the night. Martin had only to set foot ashore tomorrow to reassume rank, titles and privileges. And yet he wasn't as happy as he should have been. His mood was one of wistful melancholy as if he were about to lose something very dear and precious though he could not think what it might be.

There was no packing to be done aboard the *Albatros*. He stood alone on the poop, save for the dim black blotch of one of her people, sprawled on the deck by the wheel, heedless of the passenger, not aware that he was there. The dead ship and the white vastness of the night made Martin feel very small and lonely. A sense of regret gnawed him. He should have made more of the voyage; it should have been the experience of a lifetime yielding a rich harvest. But he had gone astray somehow, somewhere; he couldn't tell how or where. He knew the answer yet it evaded him.

He stood by the rail looking out into silver, just as he had on the Channel packet, but down in these warm Austral seas the silver was that of the moon, not fog. And just as in that other time the girl came and stood beside him, and again she didn't speak or intrude but dwelt inside herself. He was, however, amazingly aware of her—of the English Miss, the governess, the stewardess, Mlle Brown—who'd been finding jobs since she was fourteen. She hadn't made a mess of her life in the *Albatros*; she wouldn't make a mess of anything. She was so competent and wise, without any fuss or pretensions. He found himself smiling at the recollection of her very characteristic story of the Fall of Paris. Her Paris—not his! His mind and heart were full of echoes of the things she had said to him. Her mind was so candid and she saw so clearly. There was a youthful freshness and sweetness about her which would endure, as it had endured through all the laborious and ill-rewarded years. And yet by the magic of her good sense she had transmuted the dross of those years. To her they weren't laborious and ill-rewarded. She had been happy in them as she had been in the *Albatros*. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Wasn't that the way it went?

He threw the end of his cigarette into the sea and the bright

spark was quenched. He lit another. Still she did not speak, but remained beside him in a quiet reverie. She had a great capacity for companionship which made no demands and was never irksome. With her youth went an instinctive wisdom and understanding.

He turned and looked down at her. She was neat, compact. There were no frills and no trimmings. Such a dear brown sparrow!

And, all at once, there in the immense quiet of the night, everything that had been amiss was revealed to him, and his sense of melancholy and impending loss was explained in a flash. He had frittered away the precious weeks chasing the shadows of mere physical beauty and of intelligence and sophistication, and all the time the essential woman who was made for him and his peculiar needs had been there at his elbow, and though he'd been happily and comfortably aware of her he had never realised all she was and meant.

Brown looked up and discovered for the first time that he was smiling down at her, tenderly and yet in surprise, as if he had seen her for the first time at that very moment.

"Doesn't it seem long ago?" she said.

"It does, Kathie. A lifetime, and it has slipped away as a lifetime does. I could kick myself."

"But why, Martin?"

"For not making use of a lifetime. For wasting it chasing butterflies and moths. But at last I've grown up."

She laughed at that and shook her head.

"You were born that way. I've always thought of you as the very old young man."

That hadn't been clever Nicole's idea at all.

"I used to imagine that myself," he said. "I know better now. You've taught me."

"I've taught you! Oh, come!—Kathie Brown teach Martin Trevellion anything? That doesn't make sense."

"But you do," he said. "You make the most perfect sense. And here I've got to wait until this last night to discover it!"

Her little laugh came again.

"Why, Martin, you'll turn my head."

"Not I." Nor all the world he was going to give her. Nor all the people in it. Come what might that small head would remain firm on the gallant shoulders.

"Perhaps not," she admitted frankly.

There was nothing coy or flirtatious about Brown; she dangled no baits before a man.

"You're real, Kathie," he said, "and I've only just found it out in the neck of time. You must forgive me. I've lived in an unreal world among unreal people all my days."

Once more she shook her head in denial.

"Nonsense, Martin. This is the world that's unreal to you. The minute you're back——"

"No," he interrupted, "that's what I'm driving at. I've seen at last that this is a real world and mine is fake and phoney. When I go back into all the tinsel and make-believe I want to take with me something that's authentic, something I can be sure of, something that remains constant and unfailing and guiding as a compass needle." He bent down to her, gazing gravely into her face, proud and glad to feel that he was about to lift her from drudgery to the heights where she belonged and where she would be quite at home as she always was and always would be. "Kathie, dear Kathie, I want to take you with me, my little Kathie."

Even to say the words was keen delight.

A small, gasping sound broke from her. She crossed her hands on her breast, and as at their first meeting bright tears ran on her cheeks. And again they were not synthetic.

It wasn't surprising that she was too astounded for words.

"I've realised at last that I'm in love with you, Kathie. Don't blame me for being so long about it. My little wise one, I'm asking you to marry me."

There it was—the tremendous tribute, the fairy-tale recognition of virtue which might have gone for ever unvalued, the crystal slipper fitted to Cinderella's small foot which had trudged so far.

He wanted to take her in his arms and hold her safe, to make her comprehend that the old days of want and fear and slavery and dependence had gone in a glorious dawn. But somehow he couldn't. She still dwelt within herself; his words had not had time to bring her out to him.

Fondly he watched, while she gathered herself to meet this revelation in that way she had, so that she seemed to become neater, more compact.

"But, Martin, you don't know what you're saying." Her voice was soft and very steady. When he would have pro-

tested she silenced him with upraised finger. "No, my dear, you must listen to me. Martin, back in the real world, your world, it wouldn't last a week. You pride yourself on being cynical and clever and all the rest of it. You're really an utter sentimentalist. That's what makes you all you are. You've always been sorry for me, although I've told you all along you'd no need. You're sorry for me at this moment. You see me as somebody too good to be mending clothes, or minding other people's children, or working here just a stewardess. Pity and affection, Martin—not love at all. My dear, don't fret yourself, or dramatise this situation. It's beautifully simple. You think the sea has opened your eyes, but it's really blinded them. You haven't been yourself in the *Albatros*; you aren't now. You've been lost and out of your element. When it's over to-morrow——"

This was the most astounding happening of the whole voyage: this numbing, friendly flow of reason which passed through him like iced water injected into his veins.

"Don't you see that's the time I'll need you most?"

He heard himself saying it from far away.

"You're a grand person, Martin," she said, more calm, more poised, than any heroine he had ever created, "and you've made a grand gesture. You admire me because I'm what I am, and I can't tell you how grateful I am for that. But if I wasn't me I might be dazzled——" She broke off, and for the third time she shook her head, and laughed more loudly on a gay proud note. "Dazzled?" she said. "How could I be dazzled by anything else on earth? You see, dear Martin, I'm in love."

"But not with me?" His own voice sounded further away than before, remote and cold and empty as an echo from the moon.

"Oh, that would have been awfully stupid," said Brown. "No, no, Martin, with Jens."

"Jens?" He wondered whoever Jens could be.

"The first officer—Jens Larsen." Saying that name, the little quiet person called Kathie Brown glowed; she burned bright and clear, like a candle suddenly lit. "And, oh, Martin, you don't know how lucky you are, and how happy I am for everybody's sake."

"But—but—you can't fling yourself away on that red-topped log of Danish timber!"

"I can, Martin, and I have—quite, quite away. It seems to be a habit aboard the dear *Albatros*. Think of Magda, think of Nicole. Compare them with me, and think what they were glad to take, while I—I got Jens."

O God, thought Martin, she might as well have genuflected and made salaam! I have lived aboard this ship for centuries, and except that he is red and tall and shambling it's never occurred to me that this Jens was worth more than a glance and a nod.

"But a girl like you—you can't doom yourself to eternities aboard this foul tub?"

"Oh, yes, and I have. Nicole has, too. She's wiser and more experienced in the great world than you and I put together, and yet she is doing as I am. We are going on together, and that is perfect for both of us. So perfect! I think it is very fine of her, because, of course, she hasn't got Jens Larsen."

Martin Trevellion could write no lines for himself in this love scene. It had gone all awry; it had escaped from his control. He stood gaping at her, speechless, lost, stage-struck; he had dried up—he stood gaping at the English Miss, Kathie Brown, the steady and sure star, the unattainable.

They were in the *Albatros*. Even that wretched and yet precious moment wasn't sacred.

The toad hopped in, silent on his filthy, over-trodden slippers.

"Good evening, dear friendt," he mocked. "Is it now when it is so much too late, that you go making love to the Miss, my stewardess? I tell you someding now. That is always the reason that I don't have any time for you, my fine great English milord. I do not cotton to a man who don't see the great opportunity of his life when it is under his nose in my *Albatros*. He gives to me the pain in the neck, he is the sap, don't you say in slang?"

He grinned at Martin.

It was the last straw. Martin clenched his fist and revelled in the firm bite of his nails on his palm.

"Catch!" he said.

And just like the hero in a boy's adventure story Widow Trevellion's son hit Captain Erik Ole Sorensen, master and owner of the four-masted barque *Albatros*, on the very point

of the chin, without any mistake and with perfect timing and reach.

A dream came true.

The toad went up into the air and fell down flat on his back on the planks of his own poop.

And Martin stood above him, in an attitude he remembered from the *Boy's Own Paper*, fierce, triumphant. No first night had ever meant as much.

"Oh, Martin!" cried Brown, shaken out of her calm, horrified.

"Get up, Sorensen, and take some more."

Martin spoke through his teeth, and he could feel his jaw jutting out like a rocky cliff.

Captain Sorensen sat up, but he did not rise to his feet. He stayed where he was, grinning, stroking his toad's face.

"I should to have you put in irons for this," he said, "but I am a funny fellow, yes. This isn't so badt, no! For the first time I am liking you. I am thinking perhaps, after all, the *Albatros* may have done you goodt. Believe it or no, no matter—but you should be grateful. And we don't charge you nodings extra. Yes, I am pleased with this. It is goodt, very goodt. Coom now, you must drink with me many drinks. All I have been so rude to deny. We shall have the great many glasses of Snaps, you and I, my goodt friendt. Coom!"

Martin wasn't listening. He felt exultant, on top of the world. He had never punched a jaw before; the damage to his knuckles gave him exquisite pain.

Look out, Mercia, here I come! Here comes your tough guy, Martin Trevellion. Home is the sailor, home from sea! Just stand by and notice what I do to Nigel and Bruce and Ian or whoever it may be. I'll break their jaws for them. And, by the way, watch out for yourself, too, my white orchid, my dream of delight. I've been played up enough by the dames and this and that.

O Mercia!

THE END

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